

NEW

22ND JUNE 1941, 03.15: THE GERMAN ARMY INVADED THE SOVIET UNION

Bringing History to Life

All hell broke loose

Hitler ended pact with Stalin and sent millions of soldiers to the border

KIEV ★ SMOLENSK ★ LENINGRAD ★ MOSCOW

OPERATION BARBAROSSA

HOLOCAUST BEGAN

SS death squads followed behind Hitler's army

HITLER'S MEIN KAMPF

Nazis aimed to be the new master race in the East

WAR MACHINE WAS INSATIABLE

Weapons factories couldn't keep pace with demand

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EUROPE - May 1941



WELCOME

On 22nd June 1941, at 03.15, the first German soldiers crossed the border into the Soviet Union. Operation Barbarossa – the invasion of the great enemy to the east – was under way, and Hitler's plan to carve out *Lebensraum* (living space) for the Germans was finally to be put into effect.

Here in the summer of 1941, the future of Europe was at stake. If the German army managed to break the Soviet Union, Hitler's Nazi empire would have access to vast resources of steel, oil, aluminium and grain, while hundreds of arms factories and millions of fresh young men would be placed at the disposal of his armies.

The future that a German victory would bring could be glimpsed by the rest of the world over the next few months. The invasion was the beginning of a war without rules, the brutality of which bore comparison with the darkest Middle Ages. Soviet soldiers were sacrificed in senseless attacks, prisoners of war were executed without mercy, and millions of civilian Jews were murdered and thrown into mass graves.

With Operation Barbarossa, the world finally understood that Hitler meant it when he spouted about "inferior races" and ending "Jewish domination". He was actually talking about murder, death squads and so many corpses that it can be hard to fathom the scale of the millions upon millions who died on the Eastern Front.

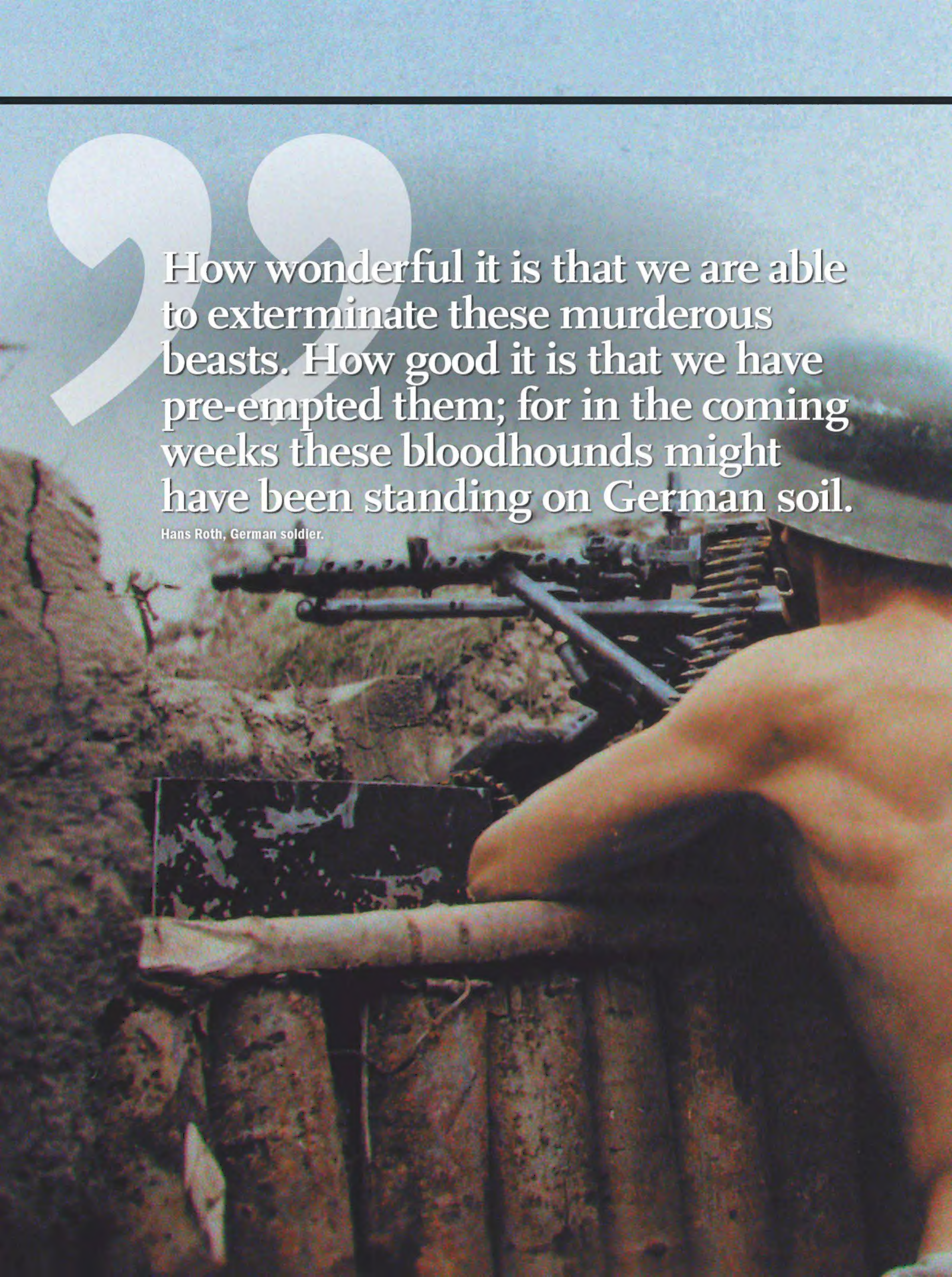
Enjoy the issue.

○ Moscow

SOVIET UNION

TURKEY

The Geneva Convention
was suspended on the Eastern Front, where millions of dead people offered visible proof of Hitler's madness.

A historical photograph of a German soldier in a trench during World War I. The soldier is shirtless and wearing a helmet, seen from the side in the foreground. In the background, a machine gun is mounted on a tripod in the trench. The scene is set in a muddy, dug-out trench with a cloudy sky above.

How wonderful it is that we are able to exterminate these murderous beasts. How good it is that we have pre-empted them; for in the coming weeks these bloodhounds might have been standing on German soil.

Hans Roth, German soldier.



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All hell broke loose at dawn

The Germans secretly sent millions of troops to the Soviet border for a new blitzkrieg in the hope of subjugating the entire European continent. **Page 18**

The Soviet line collapsed

German tanks stormed through the Soviet Union, whose armies were in total disarray. The Red Army desperately tried to halt the German advance, sacrificing thousands upon thousands of soldiers in hopeless counter-attacks. **Page 30**

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In a state of panic, the Red Army tried to establish defences at the strategically important cities of Kiev and Smolensk. Stalin knew it couldn't prevent the cities from falling, but the resistance might gain valuable time. **Page 48**

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Semen Chtipelman was at Leningrad in 1941. He was one of only a few from his unit to survive the fighting and see the war through to its bitter end. **Page 64**

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The SS Einsatzgruppen followed on the heels of Hitler's armies. The German units acted as death squads, set up for the sole purpose of exterminating Jews. **Page 68**

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The Germans were certain that all they needed to win the war was to take Moscow. So the generals sent their exhausted troops forward in one final offensive. **Page 102**

Operation Barbarossa met stiff resistance that snuffed out Hitler's dream of a quick end to World War II.



Adolf Hitler

Hitler wanted *Lebensraum* in the East.
*However, the Führer's non-aggression
pact with Soviet dictator Stalin delayed
the roll-out of his plans.*

Prelude to war, 1940-1941

29
If you're going to provoke the
Germans on the frontier by
moving troops there without
our permission, heads will roll!

Joseph Stalin.

HITLER TURNED EAST

Hitler turned East

First, they were mortal enemies. Then they became partners, allies, rivals, then mortal enemies again. The relationship between Hitler and Stalin confused all those tasked with following the two men's will, and the protagonists themselves barely understood the situation. Operation Barbarossa would simplify things.

By Esben Mønster-Kjær

Hitler wanted to capture land in the East from the moment he took his first faltering steps into German politics. He declared this in the Nazi bible, *Mein Kampf*, which he started writing in 1924 while in prison after the failed Beer Hall Putsch. Germany needed to grow in order to rival giants such as the British Empire, US, Soviet Union and China.

"When we speak of new territory in Europe today, we must principally think of Russia and the border states subject to her. Destiny itself seems to wish to point out the way for us here. In delivering Russia over to Bolshevism, fate robbed the Russian people of that intellectual class which had once created the Russian State and were the guarantee of its existence. For the Russian State was not organised by the constructive political talent of the Slav element in Russia, but was much more a marvellous exemplification of the capacity for state-building possessed by the Germanic element in a race of inferior worth," *Mein Kampf* read. Hitler believed that

German immigrants and nobles from the Baltic states had made Russia great, but with the Russian Revolution, they had been replaced by corrupt Jews.

"Just as it is impossible for the Russian to shake off the Jewish yoke by exerting his own powers, so, too, it is impossible for the Jew to keep this formidable state in existence for any long period of time. He himself is by no means an organising element, but rather a ferment of decomposition. This colossal empire in the East is ripe for dissolution. And the end of Jewish domination in Russia will also be the end of Russia as a state," wrote Hitler.

In other words, fate was smiling on the German people. The need for *Lebensraum* – living space – in the East came at a time when a Jewish Communist regime had seized the reins and, Hitler believed, the old, powerful Russia was heading for the abyss.

The Nazis had the words of *Mein Kampf* imprinted on their brains, and they became sacred doctrine once Hitler came to power. That's why so many were appalled when their beloved leader made a pact with the Soviet Union in the summer of 1939.

Shady pact supplanted enmity

Deep concern spread through Nazi ranks when news of Hitler's alliance with Stalin became known. In *Mein Kampf*, the Führer had spent several pages explaining why Germany would never cooperate with the Soviet Union's Communists. With the stroke of a pen, all this seemed to be forgotten. Top Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg railed against the lack of respect for 20 years of political struggle, as well as the part Germany had played in the Spanish Civil War – but, wisely, only in his diary:

"Our press is lacking all dignity. Today they rejoice over the traditional friendship between the German and Russian peoples. As if our struggle against Moscow had been a misunderstanding and the Bolsheviks had been the real Russians all along, with the Soviet Jews at their head! Cuddling up like this is worse than embarrassing."

Cracks in the ranks were loud enough for Hitler to hear. In response, he announced to his chiefs of staff that he had found a kindred spirit, and resistance from his inner circle would have consequences:

"Stalin and I are the only ones who visualise the future. So, in a few weeks, I shall stretch out my hand to Stalin at the common German-Russian



Joseph Stalin wanted to avoid an armed confrontation with Germany. In 1940, the Soviet Union was still too weak for that.

frontier, and with him undertake to redistribute the world. I have given the command and I shall shoot everyone who utters one word of criticism."

Poland was divided between the two dictators with little opposition. Stalin then swallowed up the small states in the East that he had been promised in a secret addendum to the pact's official wording, while Hitler was free to settle accounts with the French and British in the West. France surrendered in June 1940 after a lightning campaign that no one had foreseen. Only Britain was left.

Britain could be defeated via the East

After France's surrender, Hitler discussed with his generals and admirals what it would take to also force Britain to capitulate. Plans were made for an invasion across the English Channel, but Hitler never wholeheartedly believed in them. It would be better if the British just gave up, but something kept their hopes alive. Suspicions were gathering about the Soviet Union, noted German Army Chief of Staff Franz Halder in his diary on 22nd July 1940:

"Stalin is flirting with Britain to keep her in the war and tie us down, with a view to gain time and take what he wants, knowing he could not get it once peace breaks out. He has an interest in not letting

Germany become too strong, but there are no indications of any Russian aggressiveness against us."

Although Stalin was not considered a military threat, a successful war against the Soviet Union might bring Britain to the negotiating table, Hitler judged, making his views clear to Halder and other top-level officers, who were summoned to his Berghof summer residence in southern Germany on 31st July:

"Britain's hope lies in Russia and the United States. If Russia drops out of the picture, America, too, is lost for Britain, because elimination of Russia would tremendously increase Japan's power in the Far East. Russia is the Far Eastern sword of Britain and the United States pointed at Japan."

In other words, Hitler judged that a Soviet defeat would strengthen Japan so much that the US would not dare to enter the war. Thus, Britain would have no hope of help and would have to surrender. The army wanted to begin the invasion immediately, but in practice, it was too late in the year. The preparations alone would take four to six weeks.

"Attack achieves its purpose only if the Russian state can be shattered to its roots in one blow. Holding part of the country alone will not do. Standing still for the following winter would be perilous. So it is better to wait a little longer, but ►

German and Soviet soldiers entered Poland at roughly the same time in 1939. When the armies met in Brest, it was perfectly congenial.



Two lines of defence were Stalin's bulwark against Hitler



In 1926, Soviet engineers began building what came to be known as the Stalin Line. The Soviet Union's western border stretched 3,200 kilometres between the Baltic and Black Seas, and the vast distance precluded one continuous line of defence. Instead, the Red Army built a chain of fortified zones, each defended by concrete bunkers.

Work ended in 1939, when Stalin occupied and annexed eastern Poland after concluding his pact with Hitler. The guns were moved to depots until they could be placed in new positions 300 kilometres further west. The

western fortifications became known as the Molotov Line.

Neither the old nor the new defences were built to stop an invading army. Instead, the fortified zones acted as breakwaters, splitting up an advancing enemy while Soviet troops could counter-attack from the protection of the concrete bunkers. When Hitler attacked in the summer of 1941, the Molotov Line was far from complete. Further back, the Stalin Line lacked weapons and ammunition. Neither of the defensive lines therefore made any significant impact.



In the few places where the lines were fortified, they had anti-tank weapons.



with resolute determination to eliminate Russia... If we start in May '41, we would have five months to finish the job. Tackling it this year would have been the best, but unified action would be impossible at this time," Franz Halder wrote in his war diary. Although no decisions were made at the Berghof meeting, the Soviet Union had now become an indispensable part of Hitler's strategy against Britain.

Stalin's nerve crumbled

For most of 1940, Stalin was in a terrible mood. As the Germans had rightly surmised, the Soviet leader had hoped that Hitler's war with France and Britain would take a while. Instead, German troops marched from lightning victory to lightning victory. Senior Communist and future Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev saw how the bad news was received in Moscow:

"Hitler had been stunningly successful in his conquest of Europe... [He] occupied Norway almost without a shot, moving right beside our northern frontier near Murmansk... We were all together in the Kremlin when we heard the news over the radio that the French army had capitulated and that the Germans were in Paris. Stalin's nerves cracked when he learned about the fall of France. He cursed the governments of England and France: 'Couldn't they put up any resistance at all?' he asked despairingly."

Now the extremely efficient German army had nothing to worry about – the Soviet Union seemed to be a defenceless target. The Winter War against Finland had revealed that while the Red Army had possessed staggeringly large forces, the purges of the 1930s had reduced it to a paper tiger.

"I don't know what had weakened our army more – our shortage of armaments or the inadequacy of our commanders... [W]e should have begun much earlier to convert our industry to our wartime needs. [W]e would have repulsed the fascist invasion much more easily if the upper echelons of the Red Army command hadn't been wiped out... The military staff underwent two, three, even four changes of command... Most of the people promoted were honest and loyal, but they needed experience... Their initiation cost our people a tremendous loss of life, and it cost our country terrible ruin," Khrushchev opined.

Meanwhile, German-Soviet disagreements were bubbling up. The disputes were over the exchange of raw materials, influence in the Balkans and Finland, and Germany's war with Britain. Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov visited Berlin in autumn 1940 and even agreed to negotiate Soviet entry into the war against the British. Everything had to be done to avert a German invasion of the Soviet Union.

Hitler made biggest decision of his life

While the diplomats talked, the German Army was secretly working on a plan of attack. In the autumn,

Chief of Staff Halder had thought the plan would be unnecessary, but the mood changed when he and Commander-in-Chief Walther von Brauchitsch presented Operation Otto to Hitler on 5th December. The Führer's distrust of Stalin was now so great that he no longer listened to Moscow. The plan outlined a lightning offensive to destroy the Soviet Red Army, and the surprise attack would begin in mid-May 1941. If German troops were to be ready by that date, preparations had to begin immediately. Germany could count on help from Romania and Finland, both of whom had a score to settle with Stalin.

The meeting ended with the generals being sent off to tweak the plan. On 18th December, it became official as Führer Directive 21, and in the meantime the operation was renamed Barbarossa. The target was Soviet forces, not locations on the map. Only when the enemy's ability to fight was eliminated would the attackers head for the large industrial areas in the south and the capital Moscow in the north.

"The mass of the Russian Army in western Russia is to be destroyed in daring operations, by driving forward deep armoured wedges, and the retreat of units capable of combat into the vastness of Russian territory is to be prevented. In quick pursuit, a line is then to be reached from which the Russian Air Force will no longer be able to attack the territory of the German Reich. The ultimate objective of the operation is to establish a cover against Asiatic Russia from the general line Volga-Archangel. Then, in case of necessity, the last industrial area left to Russia in the Urals can be eliminated by the Luftwaffe," read the Führer's directive.

The battle plan for the greatest campaign in history was in place.

Soviet officers formed think tank

As Hitler began the countdown to the invasion, it was time for the annual Soviet military conference, held ►

Many newspapers – including *The Washington Star* – gloated over Hitler and Stalin's marriage of convenience.



WONDER HOW LONG THE HONEYMOON WILL LAST?

"Wonder how long the honeymoon will last?" teased the paper's satirist.

Relations between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany were so good in 1939 that the two countries' armies celebrated victory over Poland with a joint military parade.



THIS IS HOW...

...German blitzkrieg shaped Soviet strategy

Hitler's lightning victories over Poland and France caused the Red Army to dust off old plans. The Soviet generals had also been thinking about how rapid operations could defeat the enemy.

In the 1920s and early 1930s, Soviet officers were full of good ideas. They wanted to wage war in a new way, using so-called deep operations to knock the legs out from under the enemy by advancing rapidly over long distances using vehicles. In the first phase, engineer troops, infantry, artillery and the Soviet Union's growing arsenal of new tanks would work together to create a devastating hole in the enemy's front line. Once the front was breached, mobile reserves would be sent through and move quickly forward.

The threat to

supply lines and headquarters would cause cooperation between enemy units to break down, so a chaotic retreat would ensue.

The plans for deep operations were originally drawn up by officers who fell victim to Stalin's great purge of the officer corps in the late 1930s. Their ideas were shelved until the German panzer divisions began winning with tactics reminiscent of Soviet deep operations.

As war clouds gathered over Hitler and Stalin, several top Soviet officers wanted to strike first, pouncing on the German forces in

the border area. But after the purges, the Red Army was in no position to wage that kind of war. Instead, Soviet troops were outmanoeuvred by German panzer forces, who were far better at their craft. Only later did the Red Army become capable of conducting deep operations.



French tanks had no chance when they came up against German blitzkrieg. The situation prompted the Red Army leadership to change strategy.

on 23rd December in 1940. There, Stalin ordered that tactics, organisation and training had to be scrutinised. More than 250 officers, as well as top officials, battled through minus 38.8 degrees Celsius to the People's Commissariat of Defence in Moscow, where together they were to put the Red Army in order. Stalin himself stayed away, but a loyal aide reported to the Soviet leader every night. In the absence of the fearsome dictator, there was a

“cheerful and confident mood”, as one participant later related.

One of the speakers at the conference was General Georgy Zhukov, whom everyone considered a rising star. The year before, he had beaten the Japanese when troops from the two powers clashed in Mongolia, even though they were not officially at war. Zhukov urged the Soviet Union to learn from the Germans' blitzkrieg. Aircraft, armoured troops and

We must not respond to the provocations of the German military. If we ignore the provocateurs, Hitler will understand that Moscow does not want any problems with Germany. ■ Joseph Stalin.

paratroopers had to work closely together in aggressive operations conducted at such a pace that the enemy would have no time to react. That was what he had done to the Japanese. Some of the audience took Zhukov's words as a deep insult. The same method had been used against the Finns, and there the result had been a disaster that called into question the Red Army's ability to wage war at all. The general's ideas were also reminiscent of controversial proposals made by other officers before the purge of the 1930s.

However, Zhukov was supported by Semyon Timoshenko, the man who had finally defeated the Finns. He may have won with heavy shelling and frontal attacks, like the generals of World War I, but whatever the methods, he favoured offensive warfare. Timoshenko's position carried great weight, because Stalin had appointed him Minister of Defence after the hard-fought victory over Finland.

"Defence is not the decisive means of defeating the enemy. Only attack can achieve that."

The conference ended with the agreement that Zhukov might have been right on some points. In the months that followed, however, the head of the artillery, Grigory Kulik, stubbornly insisted that tanks and planes were a mere fad, whose uselessness would soon be revealed. The future belonged to good old guns, which, of course, had to be pulled by horses. In charge of shell production, he deliberately obstructed the manufacture of the types used by the army's new T-34s and KV-1s. These tanks outperformed anything the Germans could deploy, but at the start of the war, only 12 percent had a full stock of ammunition. Many were sent to the front with just a few shells or had to make do with their machine guns.

Line of defence to keep out Nazism

News of the German attack plans reached Stalin's ears while the military conference was under way in Moscow. According to a Soviet intelligence report, the assault was to take place in March 1941. Stalin's bad temper now reached new depths, and one of his closest friends even wondered whether he was losing his mind. However, the Soviet leader could see clearly enough to appoint Zhukov as chief of the General Staff on 1st February 1941. Along with Timoshenko, Zhukov was the greatest talent among the top Soviet officers, many believed, including Nikita Khrushchev:

"Unfortunately, men like Timoshenko and Zhukov were exceptions. Once Comrade Timoshenko pulled me by the sleeve into a session of the Defence Council. He wanted me to see how these people whom he had to work with were tearing at each other's throats."

As the new chief of the General Staff, Zhukov also inherited the so-called Molotov Line. With the partition of Poland in 1939, the Soviet Union's border



Grigory Kulik was Soviet chief of artillery and thought tanks and planes were a fad. His attitude was to prove fateful.

had suddenly moved 300 km west, and it now had to be fortified with guns and equipment taken from the Stalin Line along the old border. However, work proceeded at a snail's pace. Transport capacity was lacking, the guns from the old positions did not fit the new facilities, and no one seemed to be in any hurry. As a result, only a small percentage of the planned concrete bunkers were ready when war began in 1941. Landmines were catastrophically lacking, because the responsibility for producing them also lay with the head of the Soviet artillery, who loathed them as much as tanks. Grigory Kulik contemptuously called minefields a "weapon of the weak".

But, Khrushchev believed, the greatest obstacle to rearmament and improvement was Stalin himself:

"Stalin tried to supervise our manufacturing of munitions and mechanised equipment all by himself, with the result that no one really knew what state our arsenal was in... We had a terrible shortage of arms of all kinds in the first months of the war. I was a member of the Politbureau and part of Stalin's ruling circle, but I still had no way of knowing that we were woefully lacking in rifles and machine guns, not to mention tanks and heavy artillery. I couldn't imagine that we would be unprepared in such an elementary respect. Even the tsar, when he went to war against Germany in 1914, had a larger supply of rifles than we had the day after Hitler invaded."

The rearmament continued at a half-hearted pace, while Stalin clung to the hope that Hitler would not attack at all. The Soviet Union had to avoid challenging the Germans at all costs, the Soviet leader declared, ►

STRENGTH RATIO

Two giant armies faced off on the eve of Operation Barbarossa in 1941. The Red Army had almost

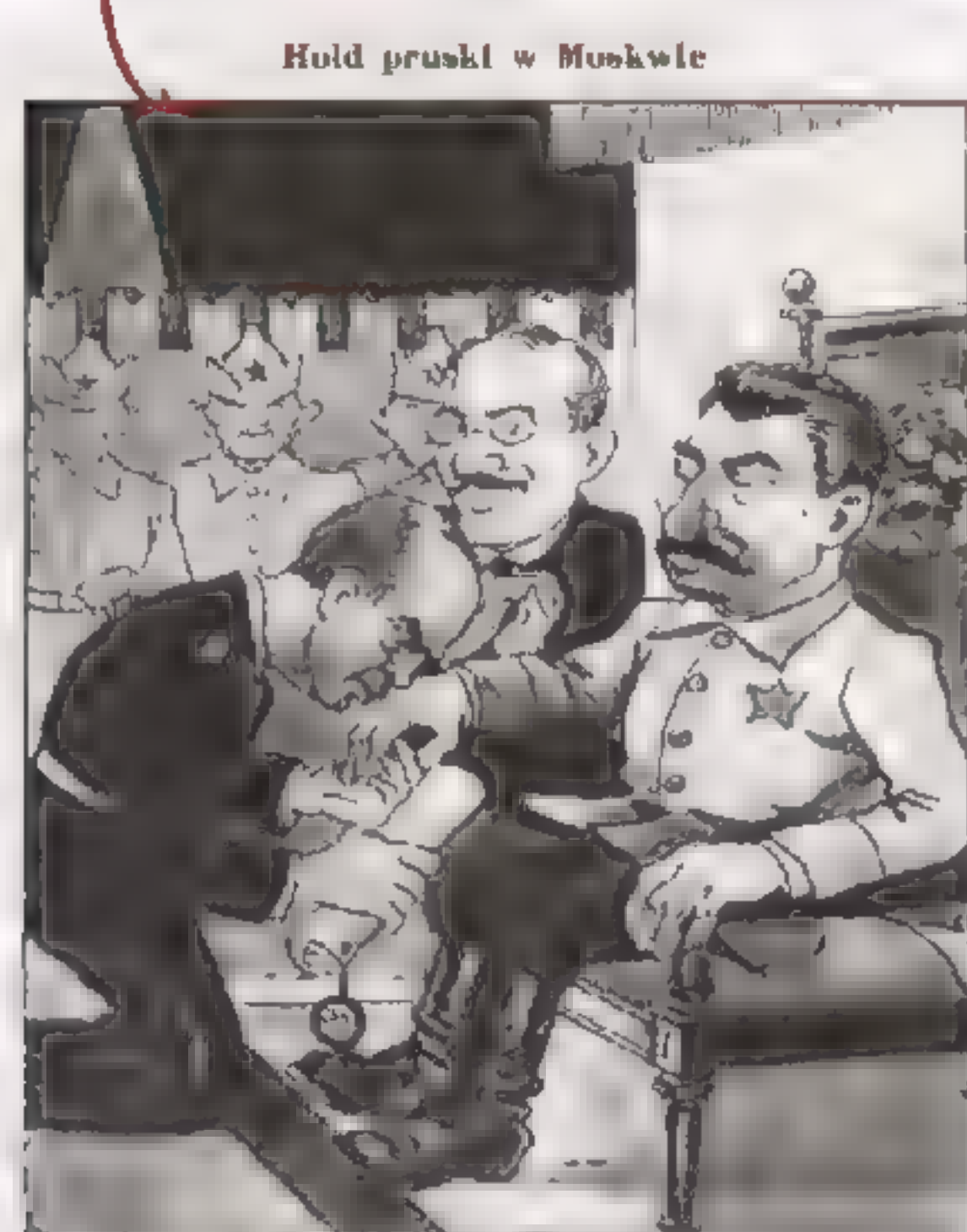
3 million

soldiers in the areas bordering Germany.

3.8 million

German soldiers stood ready to attack on the Eastern Front.

Polish newspaper *Mucha* believed that Germany could not be trusted in 1939 and Stalin knew it.



"We've signed your pact, Ribbentrop. Kiss our hand and take the pact, and as for what we'll do later, we'll think about it some more," Stalin said, according to the satirical cartoon.

according to an aide: *"We must not respond to the provocations of the German military. If we show restraint, and ignore the provocateurs, Hitler will understand that Moscow does not want any problems with Germany. He'll then take his generals in hand."*

Balkans delayed Barbarossa

German panzer divisions did not cross the border in March 1941, as Stalin's intelligence had predicted. Nor did the invasion come on 15th May, as Hitler's generals had planned. This was due to Mussolini's attack on Greece from Albania, which was a failure and required German intervention. British soldiers arrived to help the Greeks, and Hitler suspected that Yugoslavia was on its way, too. He could not accept this threat from the south, just as German troops were about to penetrate deep into the Soviet Union.

Twenty-nine divisions and 2,000 aircraft were therefore diverted to the Balkans, which proved to be far more than necessary. The forces attacked Greece and Yugoslavia on 6th April, fighting for just under two months, after which the troops had to carry out repairs and replace equipment. Operation Barbarossa,

therefore, had to be postponed until 22nd June. Britain's foreign secretary, Anthony Eden, was sure that the delay had changed the course of history when he addressed Parliament the following year:

"Regardless of what the future historians shall say, what we can say now is that Greece gave Mussolini an unforgettable lesson, that she was the motive for the revolution in Yugoslavia, that she held the Germans in the mainland and in Crete for six weeks, that she upset the chronological order of all German High



The Greek Army was too big a challenge for the Italians. So, the German Army had to step in, which helped postpone Barbarossa.

1939

On 1st September, the Germans invade Poland. On 17th September, the Soviet Union attacks from the East.

1940

Hitler proposes an alliance with Stalin. He is agreeable, but negotiations break down as, according to Hitler, Stalin gets too greedy.

1941

On 22nd June, Germany breaks the non-aggression pact and invades the Soviet Union with several million troops.

Command's plans and thus brought a general reversal of the entire course of the war and we won."

The minister's interpretation, however, was linked to his own shared responsibility for the British defeat in the Balkans. The failure didn't look so bad if it had disrupted Operation Barbarossa. After the war, Eden's defensive speech found its way into the history books, but Barbarossa might have been postponed even without the Balkan campaign. Spring came late to the western Soviet Union in 1941. Meltwater swelled the

rivers and roads turned to mud as late as June. German blitzkrieg could not occur in such conditions. Meanwhile, the attack on Greece and Yugoslavia took barely three weeks.

War to be fought without rules

Even before the Balkan campaign began, the Germans were making final plans for Operation Barbarossa. Hitler met with over 200 top officers on 30th March 1941, and ►



Stalin seemed to me, compared to the earlier encounters, aged... It can't be ruled out that Stalin was under the influence of alcohol. ■ German military attaché.

Halder recorded the details in his war diary. The huge length of the front line meant that German troops couldn't attack everywhere at once. Tanks and planes had to be concentrated on key points where they would break through Soviet defences and penetrate deep behind the front. But the meeting between Hitler and his generals was about more than operational plans. Halder noted that the campaign was also a showdown to break Communism's grip in Eastern Europe. Committed Nazis could therefore breathe a sigh of relief after two years in which their old mortal enemy had become an unwelcome ally.

Now Hitler was back where he had been when he wrote *Mein Kampf*. Halder noted that Barbarossa was to be conducted without respect for the rules of war:

"Communism is an enormous danger for our future. We must forget the concept of comradeship between soldiers. A Communist is no comrade... This is a war of extermination. If we do not grasp this, we shall still beat the enemy, but 30 years later we shall again have to fight the Communist foe. We do not wage war to preserve the enemy."

The meeting of 30th March led to two orders that came to characterise the brutality on the Eastern Front. The Barbarossa Decree authorised – against all codes of conduct – the annihilation of suspected saboteurs, and collective responsibility of civilian Soviets, while German soldiers would not be prosecuted for any war crimes they committed. The subsequent Commissar Order targeted Communist commissars who accompanied Soviet troops into battle: *"The originators of barbaric, Asiatic methods of warfare are the political commissars. So immediate and unhesitatingly severe measures must be undertaken against them. They are therefore,*

when captured in battle, as a matter of routine to be dispatched by firearms."

These orders sent several generals to the gallows when the score was settled at the Nuremberg Trials after the war. But not Halder, who fell out with Hitler and played down his share of the responsibility.

Stalin still hoped for peace

The day of the invasion, 22nd June 1941, was approaching and ominous rumours were pouring into Moscow. Some dismissed the stories as the German campaign in the Balkans had convinced them that Hitler's attention was focused south, not east. Stalin himself was constantly changing his stance. On 5th May, he gave a speech and reception in the Kremlin to 2,000 cadets from the Soviet Military Academy. After several toasts, he became bellicose:

"Defending our country, we must act offensively. From defence to go to a military doctrine of offensive actions. We must transform our training, our propaganda, our agitation, our press in an offensive spirit. The Red Army is a modern army, and a modern army is an offensive army."

After further alcohol, Stalin warmed to his subject. A direct anti-German stream of words followed:

"Germany wishes to destroy our socialist state, which the workers won under the leadership of Lenin's Communist Party. Germany wishes to destroy our great Fatherland, Lenin's Fatherland, the results of [the] October [Revolution], to wipe out millions of Soviet people and enslave those who are left. Only a war with fascist Germany and a victory in that war can save our Fatherland."

The message was unmistakable. In response, just ten days later, Zhukov and Timoshenko presented a plan to wipe out the German troops in the border region with a surprise attack. However, they themselves were surprised by Stalin's reaction:

"It's all Timoshenko's work. He's preparing everyone for war. He ought to have been shot. You have to realise that Germany on her own will never fight Russia... If you're going to provoke the Germans on the frontier by moving troops there without our permission, heads will roll!"

Stalin still fantasised that he had an understanding with Hitler. And he believed that the Führer was fighting to hold back the belligerent German generals. At a Moscow train station, a German military attaché ran into Stalin. Colonel Krebs wrote in a report home how the dictator patted him kindly on the arm while swearing eternal friendship with Germany.

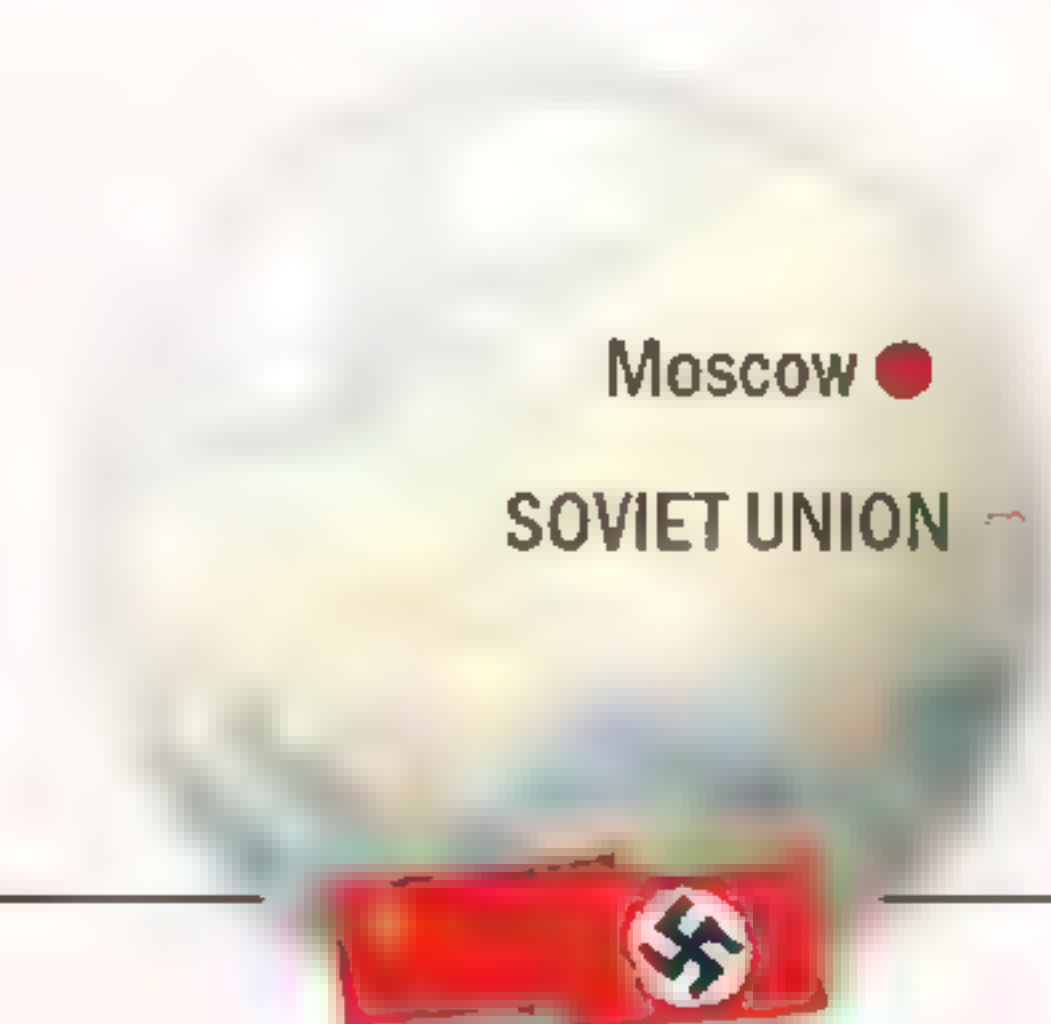
"Stalin seemed to me, compared to the earlier encounters, aged... It can't be ruled out that Stalin was under the influence of alcohol."

Soon the truth would be obvious even to Stalin. The showdown that Hitler had called for from his prison cell back in 1924 would finally begin. ■

The inhabitants of Moscow received the news of Germany's attack with horror.



Colonisation would make Eastern Europe Aryan

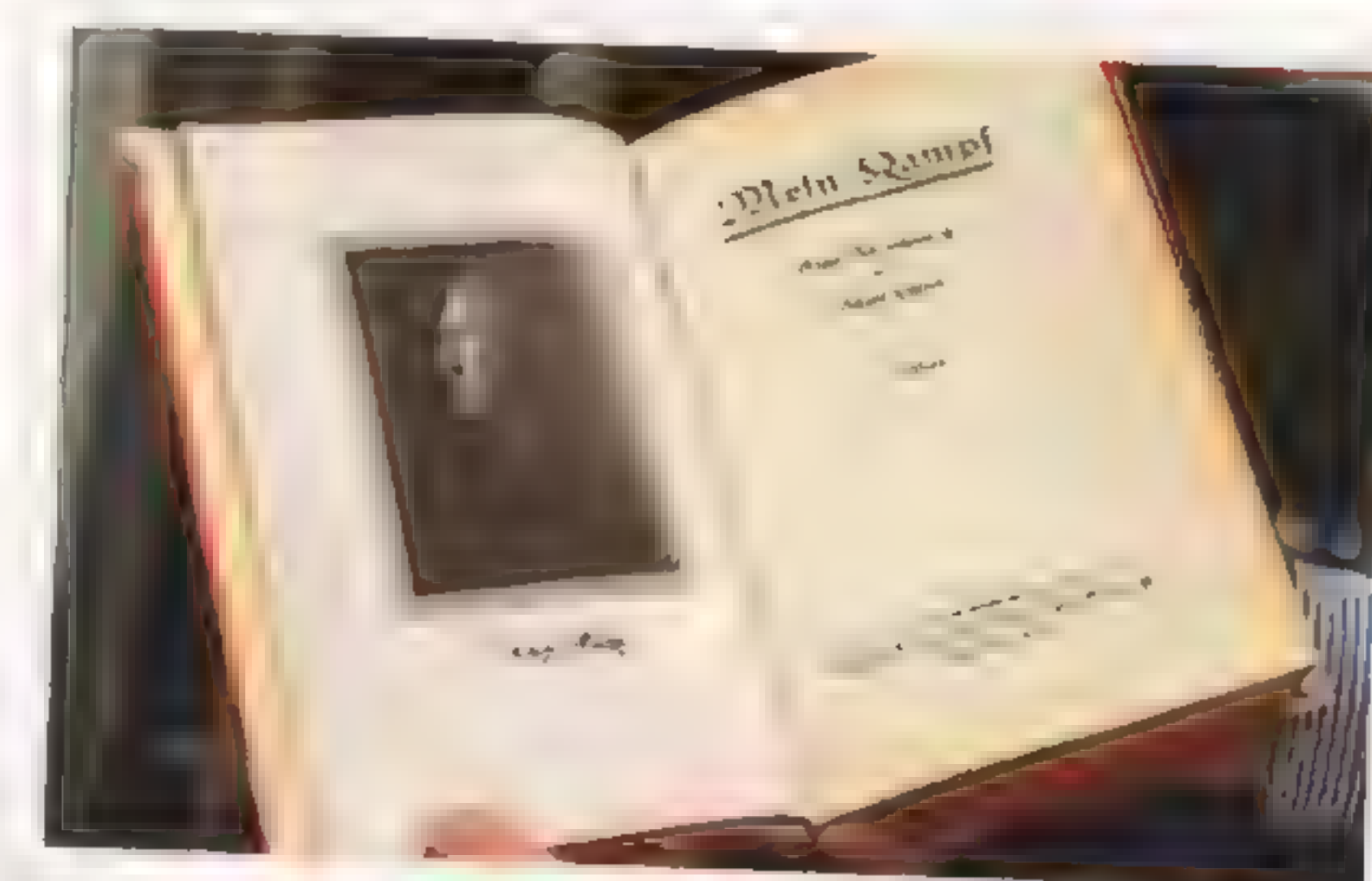


Nazi Germany's Generalplan Ost was a blueprint for how millions of people were to settle in Poland and the Soviet Union. Others would have the honour of being 'Germanised' when the Germans arrived and became the new master race in Eastern Europe.

In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler had demanded living space in the East for the Germans. Generalplan Ost, written in 1940 and revised several times since, was meant to turn the Führer's words into reality. The final version outlined how ten million settlers would take possession of the captured land. Hitler envisaged not only

Germans but also Scandinavians, Western Europeans and perhaps Americans settling there. The regime intended to empty the cities, some of which would perish, while new model communities would be built.

The fate of the locals depended on their race. Some Slavic peoples, and Estonians and Latvians in particular, were considered worthy enough to be subjected to a Germanisation programme, so they would become German. Some 31 million others were destined for deportation, extermination or slave labour. The plan was to be implemented over 25-30 years.



In Mein Kampf, Hitler outlined in detail how Eastern Europe was to be made Aryan.





ALL HELL BROKE LOOSE AT DAWN

Still 20 minutes to go
until the start of the
attack. Good Lord, the
minutes pass by so
begrudgingly today.

Hubert Hegele German soldier.

22nd June 1941

At 03.15 on 22nd June, German soldiers launched Operation Barbarossa. Along an extensive front, millions of soldiers poured into the Soviet Union.



All hell broke loose at dawn

By Benjamin Christensen

In the summer of 1941, the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany were, on paper, allies. But Germany was determined to crush the Soviet Bear and had secretly sent millions of troops to the Soviet border. Now, with another blitzkrieg, it planned to ensure Germany's total domination of the European continent.

On 21st June 1941, the largest army the world had ever seen lined up along the 1,500-kilometre border with the Soviet Union. Millions of German, Hungarian, Slovakian, Romanian and Finnish soldiers were ready to attack. For weeks, rumours had been circulating among the soldiers. Some thought that the Soviet foreign minister, Vyacheslav Molotov, had attempted a coup in Moscow, and they were there to support it. Among the more fanciful rumours was that, with Stalin's permission, they were to pass through the Soviet Union to attack British territory in India and the Middle East. Some of the soldiers, however, were convinced that Germany's ally, the Soviet Union itself, was the target of the enormous operation, but doubts lingered. As they did with Private Hubert Hegele, who was on the southern front in June:

"An attack on the Soviet Union? Well, we don't believe that at all. First of all, Germany has a friendship pact and a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union; and secondly – a battle against this vast empire? No, that won't happen."

On the other side of the border, most Soviet officers were also convinced that there wouldn't be a war any time soon. When a staff officer asked the commander of the Western Front, General Dimitry Pavlov, whether preparations should be made for a German attack, the general stood up, pushed all the papers off the table he had been sitting at, and shouted angrily:

"War is possible, but not in the near future. Now we must prepare for the autumn manoeuvres and make sure that no alarmist answers German provocations with fire."

In Germany, however, Hitler needed no excuse. On the evening of 21st June, the army High Command sent a message to all units on the border containing a single word: "Dortmund." It was the code word signifying that at 03.15, the German Army would begin its attack on the Soviet Union.

All along the front, German soldiers were preparing for battle. There was a strange calm before all hell would break loose in a few hours, recalled Private Hans Roth, who was on the central part of the border near the Soviet village of Movnyky, on the opposite side of the Bug River. He noted in his diary:

"The attack starts tonight at 03.00. We are attached to the von Kleist group. Our assignment: a rapid

putsch in wedge formation, regardless of casualties. For the moment there is a quiet, wonderful twilight peacefulness over the countryside. The huts in the village will be in flames in a few hours; the air will be filled with the howling and screeching of shells. The impact of the shelling will tear apart the fields and roads. How amazing it is that we are once again part of this offensive – fighting under Kleist. Farewell my wife and sweet Erika. Farewell my beloved parents. You will be in my thoughts tomorrow. Do not worry; a soldier's luck will be with me."

Hubert Hegele, who'd considered an attack on the Soviet Union impossible a few hours earlier, noted:

"02.55 hours. Still 20 minutes to go until the start of the attack. Good Lord, the minutes pass by so begrudgingly today. ... We are just 20 metres from the border fence. The concentration of our assault troops has succeeded perfectly. The enemy has noticed nothing. The Russian sentries standing on their observation post haven't a clue. It's just two men, but they'll be the first to go down. 03.06 hours. If I could only smoke a cigarette. The sky is now cloudless and the stars are shining down on us insignificant souls... You cannot grasp hold of sober thoughts in these final minutes – but you hardly need to. I make a little prayer and ask the Good Lord to stand by my side."

"03.10 hours. Still five minutes. The faces of my comrades look like grey masks. Their gaze is fixed straight ahead. The pounding in our chests grows stronger and stronger. The pioneers begin – very quietly, so you can hardly hear it – to cut a couple of pathways through the wire with their large shears. We still have two minutes to go."

Red Army was unprepared

On the Soviet side of the border, few suspected anything. True, there had been more activity on the German side in the past week, and in some places the noise of German trucks and tanks revving their engines had been heard. However, little and conflicting intelligence had been received from the army command.

At 01.00 on 22nd June, a message ticked in to the various army units, warning that the Germans were ready to attack, but that they must not be provoked under any circumstances. The order was confusing for many officers, who didn't know whether they ►

The M24 hand grenade was standard equipment for German soldiers.



Soldiers carried the grenade on their belt so they could grab it quickly.

Flat, desolate steppe met the Germans in many places after they crossed the border to the Soviet Union. Nothing prevented the invasion from advancing.

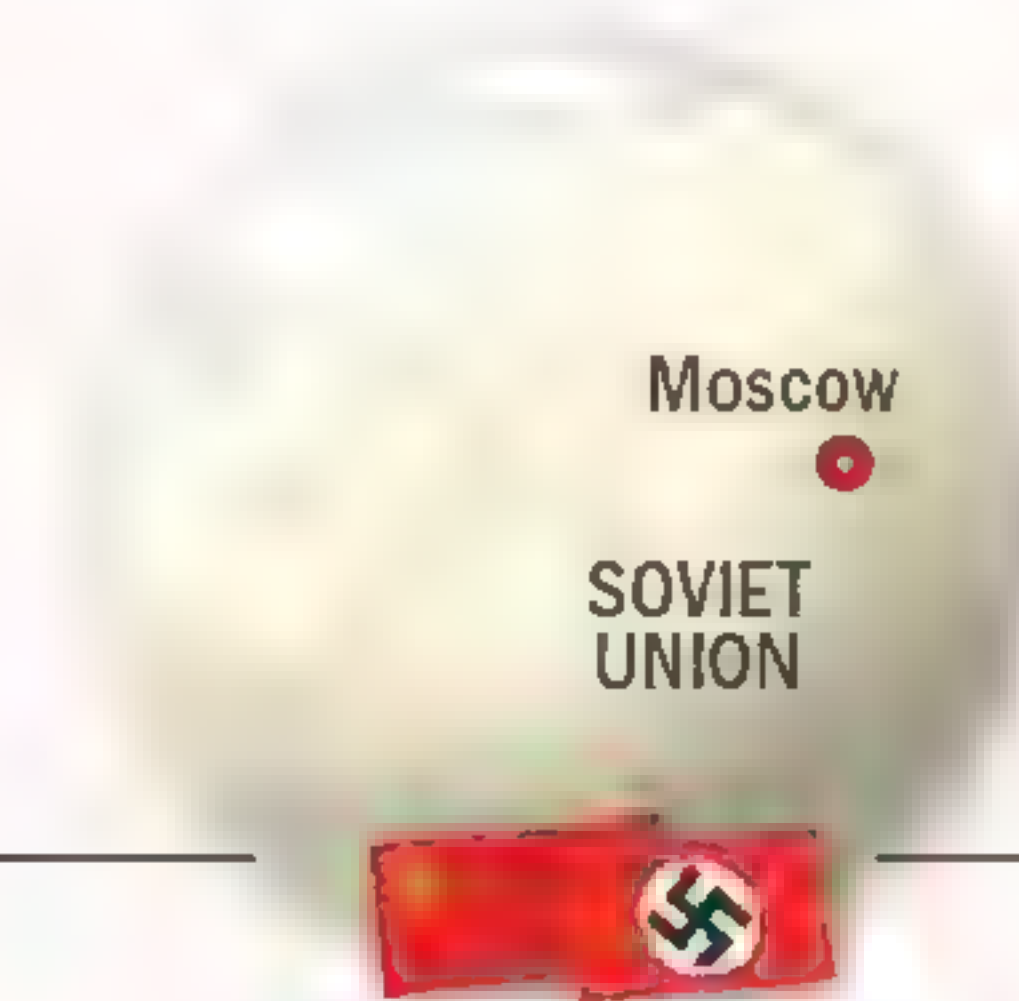


Soviet Union would be sent to Siberia

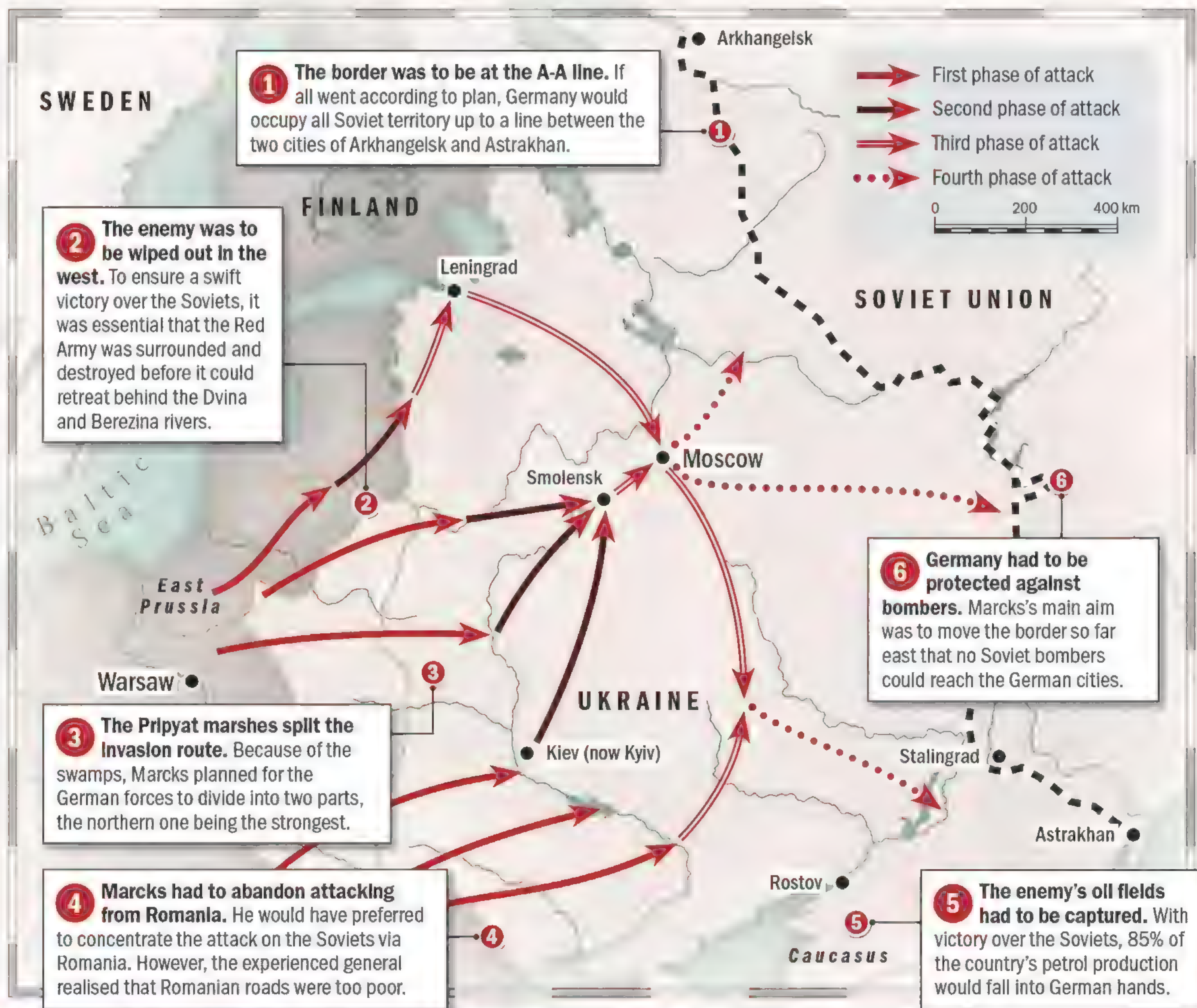
In summer 1940, after the occupation of France, German General Erich Marcks was asked to draw up a plan for a future war against the Soviet Union. Marcks's proposal, Operation Draft East, aimed to defeat the Red Army and occupy the main industrial areas of the Soviet Union. The early draft, with some modifications, became the basis of the final invasion plans of Operation Barbarossa. Marcks wanted to protect Germany from future Soviet aggression by moving the border so far east that German cities would forever be out of reach of Soviet

bombers. In the draft plan, he therefore proposed that the attack should not cease until the German Army had created a border running from Arkhangelsk on the White Sea in the north to Astrakhan on the Caspian Sea in the south – one it dubbed the A-A line.

The general envisaged that all operational objectives – including the capture of Moscow – could be achieved in nine to 17 weeks. In reality, the Red Army and the Russian winter came between Hitler and the A-A line. When the Germans came closest to their objective in 1941, they were still around 400 km away.



According to German plans, blitzkrieg would move the border far to the east.



In a snatch we are on the other side of the river where rattling machine-gun fire awaits us. We have our first casualties. ■ Hans Roth, German soldier.

should return fire if the enemy attacked. But few places took the warning seriously. Besides, the 22nd was a Sunday and many units had chosen to give their soldiers the day off. The commander of the Soviet Western Front, General Dimitry Pavlov, for example, was in Minsk to see an operetta with his officers when he received the message. However, he didn't believe that the news should prevent him and his officers from watching the end of the show. They could return to their units afterwards.

The Soviet army leadership wasn't very worried either. When General Pavlov contacted Marshal Semyon Timoshenko by telephone, he was told:

"Just try to worry less and don't panic. Get the staff together anyway this morning, because something unpleasant may happen perhaps, but don't rise to any provocation."

A few units were sent to the border, but not too many, because Stalin had not yet given up the idea of negotiating with Hitler to secure peace.

Attack was planned in detail

While confusion and chaos reigned on the Soviet side, German officers were fully aware of what was to happen in the coming hours, days and weeks. The 1,500-kilometre border had been divided into three parts, each to be dealt with by a separate Army Group.

The plan was for German infantry to cross the border and crush the few Soviet forces that resisted, then for panzer troops to advance at speed behind enemy lines, create confusion and then surround the foe, capturing and wiping out Soviet units in large pincer manoeuvres.

If all went as the German High Command had planned, the Red Army would be wiped out and the European part of the Soviet Union would be in Germany's hands before winter set in. The war would effectively be over, and the Soviet Union reduced to a German vassal state.

On the German side of the border, Hubert Hegele looked over to two Soviet border guards, who had no idea anything untoward was happening.

"03.15 hours. Finally! ... [A]ll eyes are on the hand of the assault troop leader. And with the raising of his hand, two shots from our sharpshooters resound through the night. The two Russian sentries collapse. The campaign against the Soviet Union has begun."

Elsewhere on the front, German Hans Roth and his unit were ready to storm across the Bug River and attack the Soviet bunkers on the opposite bank:

"All of a sudden, at exactly 03.15 hours, and apparently out of the blue, an opening salvo emerges from the barrels of hundreds of guns of all calibres. ... It is impossible to comprehend one's world in such an inferno. Our homeland is still innocently asleep while here death is already collecting a rich harvest. We crouch in our holes with pallid but

resolved faces while counting the minutes until we storm the Bug fortifications."

One of the Soviet border fortifications was the old Brest Fortress, built in the 19th century. The German artillery also launched a devastating bombardment there. Private German Walther Loos listened with his comrades to the sound of howling shells:

"Involuntarily ducking our heads, we were almost forgetting to breathe. However, a second later the artillery fire of a different heavy gun gathered such a deafening and breath-taking strength like I never experienced later. Even those participants in World War I among us later acknowledged that at that time, they had never experienced fire of such concentrated power. The sky turned red, and even though it was night, it became as light as day. Large trees fringing the Bug swayed wildly and were torn to pieces as if from an invisible force by the atmospheric pressure of the passing shells."

German soldiers crossed the border

All along the border, the Soviet positions were subjected to a brutal and devastating bombardment from thousands of German guns, and the Soviet soldiers staggered out of their bunkers, tents and barracks, sleep-deprived, confused and in shock.

*"It is now 03.30 hours. A whistle sounds; we quickly jump out from undercover and at an insane speed cross the 20 metres to the inflatable boats. In a snatch we are on the other side of the river where rattling machine-gun fire awaits us. We have our first casualties,"*wrote German soldier Hans Roth.

"With the help of a few ofsturm-pionieren [assault pioneers], we slowly – much too slowly – eat through the barbed wire barriers. Meanwhile, shells fire into the bunkers at Molnikow. In a few short steps we are able to advance to the first bunker, arriving in its blind spot. The Reds fire like mad but are unable to reach us. ... An explosive specialist approaches the bunker from behind and shoves in ►

ERICH MARCKS (1891-1944)

When the head of the German Army High Command chose General Erich Marcks to draw up a plan for the invasion of the Soviet Union, it was no accident. Since joining the army in 1910, Marcks had distinguished himself with his great organisational talent. The attack on the Soviet Union, however, came at a high cost to Marcks. In the first days of the invasion, he was wounded in the leg, which had to be amputated to save his life. He continued as a general in the army until he was killed in Normandy in 1944.





Huge quantities of useful Soviet equipment and weapons fell into German hands during the first weeks of the war.

a short-fused bomb into the bunker's fire hole. The bunker shook and black smoke emerged from its openings, signalling its final doom. We move on."

The Soviet border guards were taken completely by surprise, and communication with the units behind the front was slow. German commandos had been the first to sneak across the border the night before, destroying telegraph and telephone lines, leaving most Soviet front-line units without a direct channel to headquarters and having to rely on messengers.

"During the night the messenger, Anisimov, from the border post ... came by and reported that the Germans had set pontoons in the water and were preparing to cross the river. No orders were received from the divisional staff. The wire communications had been cut by saboteurs," recalled Soviet artilleryman Anatolij Kazakov.

Soon German panzer units were rolling over bridges that had been captured before the Soviet border guards could blow them up. Elsewhere along the Bug River, German tanks had been adapted so they could cross the river underwater.

Luftwaffe ruled the air

As the German Army attacked, thousands of Luftwaffe planes took off to bomb Soviet airbases, railways and military installations. One of the pilots, Lieutenant Arnold Döring, noticed in amazement that there was no one to stop them:

"The ground below is covered with haze, but the targets nevertheless are clearly visible. I am surprised that we are not met with any counteraction. This will come as a surprise to those below!"

At one of the Soviet airbases, pilot Alexander Khaila was on the ground, and there the Germans' attack did indeed come as a surprise: *"It rained heavily*

during the night of 21st/22nd June, and when the alarm sounded no one wanted to get up, as everyone thought it was yet another training exercise. Our entire training process was a series of alarms and they came almost every Sunday."

At another airbase, Ivan Gaidaenko also heard the air raid warning, but he wasn't worried either:

"We assumed it was a training alarm and ran to our white planes ... warmed up the engines and prepared for take-off. We prepared photo cameras and attached dummy concrete bombs just in case. No one realised it was a real alarm."

Meanwhile, Arnold Döring and hundreds of his fellow German pilots all along the front dropped the first bombs on the still unsuspecting Soviet air force:

"The 'eggs' are released. Piles of fire and smoke, fountains of earth and dust, mixed with wreckage parts of all kinds, are shooting vertically upward. Unfortunately, our bomb rows lay to the right side of the ammunition bunkers. But a whole row of bombs goes down across the entire field and ploughs the runway. ... As the formation makes a turn, I can see 15 of the parked fighters go up in flames."

Hundreds of Soviet aircraft were destroyed before their pilots could get airborne. And the few pilots who did take off – untrained as they were – were easy prey for the experienced German fighter pilots. One of the few Soviet pilots who managed to launch a counter-attack on the German invaders on 22nd June was Vitaly Klimenko. Together with his unit commander, he fired at advancing German columns. But when the two pilots returned to base, they were met with a fierce diatribe from their regimental commander:

"Arrest them. No flights for these two. Who permitted you to strafe those columns? Do you know what's going on? I don't. Maybe you are responsible for an act of provocation. Maybe those were friendly troops."

During the first day of the invasion, the Luftwaffe destroyed 76 Soviet airbases. Major-General of Aviation Ivan Kopets, commander of the air forces on the Soviet Western Front, flew a reconnaissance circuit over his damaged airbases. In the area he was responsible for, half the aircraft had been disabled on the first day of the war. Distraught by the situation, he committed suicide immediately after landing.

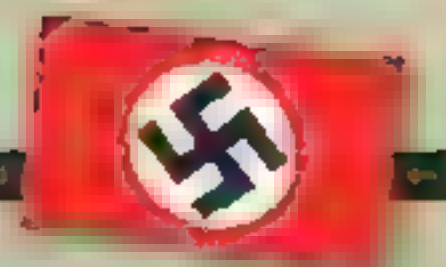
Confusion in the Red Army

For officers in the Soviet Union's 4th Army, the morning had brought one German aerial bombardment after another, and now ground forces were heading for their headquarters in Kobrin. The Soviets were hurriedly packing everything up, ready to evacuate, as the town's public address system blared out the daily news. Everyone stopped to listen:

"It's six o'clock, Moscow time. We begin our broadcast of the latest news." The officers pricked ►

FACTS

In a matter of hours, the Germans smashed the Red Army's entire chain of command with Operation Barbarossa – from the privates at the front to the army command in Moscow. That is why it took several days for Soviet leaders to understand the full scale of the disaster and that their troops were in retreat across the board.



Directive sealed Soviet Union's fate

In Führer Directive 21, Hitler laid out the goal of the forthcoming invasion of the Soviet Union and, more importantly, how it would proceed.

During World War II, Hitler issued a series of directives – orders and instructions to military and civilian personnel on the conduct of the war and the management of captured territories. On 18th December 1940, he issued his 21st, dealing with war against Nazi Germany's greatest ideological

enemy – the Soviet Union. In it, the coming invasion of the Bear to the East was referred to as Operation Barbarossa for the first time, after Frederick Barbarossa – the red-bearded Holy Roman Emperor and crusader who conquered northern Italy in the 12th century. Hitler's hope was that a lightning

victory over the Soviets would force the British to the negotiating table and consolidate Germany's status as Europe's undisputed superpower.

"We have only to kick in the door and the whole rotten structure will come crashing down," the Führer confidently declared.

DIRECTIVE NO. 21: The order was Hitler's Führer Directive No. 21 and it declared, "The German Wehrmacht must be prepared to crush Soviet Russia in a quick campaign (Operation Barbarossa) even before the conclusion of the war against England."

Anlage 3

Der Führer und Oberste Befehlshaber
der Wehrmacht

F. H. Qu., den 18. 12. 40

OKW/WFSt/Abt. L (I) Nr. 33 408/40 g. K. Chefs.

Weisung Nr. 21 Fall Barbarossa.

Die deutsche Wehrmacht muß darauf vorbereitet sein, auch vor Beendigung des Krieges gegen England, Sowjetrußland in einem schnellen Feldzug niederzuwerfen (Fall Barbarossa).

Die Vorbereitungen der Oberkommandos sind auf folgender Grundlage zu treffen:

I.) Allgemeine Absicht:

Die im westlichen Rußland stehende Masse des russischen Heeres soll in kühnen Operationen unter weitem Vortreiben von Panzerkeilen vernichtet, der Abzug kampfkraftiger Teile in die Weite des russischen Raumes verhindert werden.

In rascher Verfolgung ist dann eine Linie zu erreichen, aus der die russische Luftwaffe reichsdeutsches Gebiet nicht mehr angreifen kann. Das Endziel der Operation ist die Abschirmung gegen das asiatische Rußland aus der allgemeinen Linie Wolga - Archangelsk. So kann erforderlichenfalls das letzte Rußland verbleibende Industriegebiet am Ural durch die Luftwaffe ausgeschaltet werden.

II.) Voraussichtliche Verbündete und deren Aufgaben:

III.) Die Führung der Operationen:

A.) Heer (in Genehmigung der mir vorgetragenen Absichten):

In dem durch die Pripjetsümpfe in eine südliche und eine nördliche Hälfte getrennten Operationsraum ist der Schwerpunkt nördlich dieses Gebietes zu bilden. Hier sind 2 Heeresgruppen vorzusehen.

THE RED ARMY HAD TO BE DESTROYED: "The mass of the Russian Army in western Russia is to be destroyed in daring operations ... and the retreat of units ... is to be prevented," Hitler ordered. The plans of attack were to be based on that strategy.

ALLIES: Hitler counted on help from his allies. On the flanks of the attack, Romania and Finland would attack in the south and north respectively. Hitler also believed that he could use the Swedish road and rail network.

The populace greets us joyfully, some with tears in their eyes. ■ Gerhard Bopp, German soldier.

up their ears, hoping that the bulletin would tell them what was going on at the front. But the broadcast was all about the excellent harvest, bombings in Britain, hostilities in Syria and a weather forecast. The German Army's invasion of the Soviet Union, which had now been under way for several hours, was not mentioned at all. Instead, the broadcast continued with a morning workout: *"Time for exercise. Stretch your arms out, bend! Livelier! Up, down. Livelier!"* The officers looked at each other in disbelief as they heard the sound of German bombers in the distance.

In the port of Sevastopol, Admiral Oktyabrsky was in contact with the army command in Moscow, as his naval base was under air attack. But Moscow refused to believe the admiral, who shouted into the phone:

"Yes, yes, we are being bombed. Just now a bomb exploded quite close to staff headquarters."

In the background, one of his officers was amazed

that Moscow didn't believe the admiral, and sure enough, the head of the Soviet security service NKVD, Lavrenti Beria, called up the admiral shortly afterwards to inform him that Sevastopol was not being bombed. On the Soviet side of the border, the vast majority of soldiers not directly on the front line were still completely unaware of the ongoing attack and were now getting up for another day.

"The morning of 22nd June was magnificent," recalled Polish Fred Virski, who was drafted into the Soviet army after Poland's occupation.

"From the soaked tents, from the ground and from the trees, a thick mist rose into the sky. The sun was merrily warming the countryside. We dragged ourselves out of the wet blankets and hung our clothes on ropes and branches. Since it was Sunday and no duties were expected, we wandered among the tents in bathing trunks. Contrary to regulations, we had breakfast in the tents, as our uniforms were



not dry enough to put on." It wasn't until noon that Fred Virski's artillery unit was called to assemble.

"We put on our still-humid clothes. In the neighbouring regiment from Kharkov, the same feverish commotion reigned. We asked Karpyenko what had happened. 'I don't know,' he said. 'But something very important.' 'Maybe a war,' suggested Walter. We looked at him as if he'd gone crazy. ... Half an hour after the commotion had started, the regiment was assembled on the square in front of the mess. In the centre, two trucks took the place of a tribune. On one of them stood a tremendous portrait of Stalin... The major and the commissar stepped on to the tribune. The commissar raised his arm, indicating that he was about to speak. A tense silence fell over the square," Virski later recalled.

"This morning," the commissioner began, "our deadly enemy, Germany, bombed our cities and villages without

warning. The commissar of foreign affairs, Molotov, pronounced a historic speech declaring war!"

Some time passed in incredulous silence as the soldiers digested the news. Then the quiet was broken by the voice of Molotov announcing the attack over the loudspeaker. Stalin himself was too shocked to break the news, so Molotov had to step in:

"Today, at four o'clock in the morning, German troops have entered our country, without making any demands on the Soviet Union and without a declaration of war. They have attacked our borders in many places and have subjected our towns – Zhitomir, Kyiv, Sevastopol, Kaunas and some others – to aerial bombardments during which more than 200 people have been killed or wounded," Molotov began.

All over the Soviet Union, people listened to the foreign minister's speech, and as Molotov spoke expressionlessly of the attacks on border posts and cities, a spirit of resistance spread among the ►

The German forces were divided into three: North, Centre and South. On the northern front and in the centre, the Germans quickly broke through the Soviet lines, while in the south resistance was unexpectedly fierce.



How wonderful it is that we are able to exterminate these murderous beasts. How good it is that we have pre-empted them. ■ Hans Roth, German soldier.

population. In Moscow and several other cities, people flocked to army recruitment offices, where thousands signed up for military service. Among units like Virski's, far from the front, preparations for mobilisation began. Virski's friend optimistically believed they would be in Berlin within a month. The same attitude was not to be found among the soldiers already fighting at the front, however. There, position after position was being overrun by German troops who, as well as having caught the Red Army completely off guard, were also numerically superior.

Brest Fortress stood firm

All along the front, German forces were advancing. On the first day alone, panzer forces such as those of General Hermann Hoth reached 50-70 kilometres into Soviet territory and captured key bridges over the Nemunas River. In several places, the German invaders were welcomed as liberators – including in Lithuania, as German soldier Gerhard Bopp discovered as he marched through Vilnius:

"The populace greets us joyfully, some with tears in their eyes. The girls and children throw flowers at us."

It wasn't such plain sailing everywhere. As Soviet positions fell one by one, the defenders of the Brest Fortress on the German border held out despite heavy bombardment. The Germans claimed the fortress had a garrison of only a few hundred men, but there were around 7,000 soldiers. They were quickly surrounded

and besieged. An unnamed German soldier described the fighting around the fortress, located in present-day Belarus on an island in the Bug River:

"The battles on the islands extremely difficult. Complex terrain ... and the enemy is everywhere. His snipers are excellently camouflaged in the trees. ... Superb snipers! Shooting from hatches in the ground, basement windows, sewage pipes."

Slowly the Germans captured building after building. A whole month passed before the Soviet forces surrendered. The last defenders were thirsty, starving and had used up all their ammunition.

Mistreatment and killing spread

From the first day of the invasion, it was clear to the soldiers that this war would be different from what they had experienced in France and Scandinavia, for example. Civilians and soldiers would not be treated with the same consideration.

"Slowly our nerves grow accustomed to the all-too familiar gruesome images. Close to the Reds' customs house lies a large mound of fallen Russians, most of them torn to shreds from the shelling. Slaughtered civilians lie in the neighbouring house. The horribly disfigured bodies of a young woman and her two small children lie among their shattered personal belongings," recalled Hans Roth. To his wife, he noted in his diary: *"I am compelled to think of you, Rosel and Erika, when I witness such horrible images. How*

The Germans were welcomed – as here in Lviv, in Ukraine – as liberators from Communism. But their brutality soon changed the citizens' attitude.



wonderful it is that we are able to exterminate these murderous beasts. How good it is that we have preempted them; for in the coming weeks these bloodhounds might have been standing on German soil. ... We have taken our first prisoners – snipers and deserters receive their deserved reward.”

Crimes were also committed by the Soviets. Corporal Fritz Hübner came across the bodies of a unit of German reconnaissance troops: *“They’d had their genitals cut off while still alive, their eyes gouged out, throats cut, or ears and noses cut off.”*

After this, Hübner and his comrades responded in a similar way when taking prisoners. Therefore, even though thousands of Soviet soldiers surrendered in the first days of the invasion, many did not dare.

Red Army counter-attacked

While the Soviet forces were overwhelmed on the first day of the invasion, the following day they began to counter-attack. Hans Roth and his Panzerjäger company encountered one of the units:

“Never have we experienced anything like this: 100 Russian tanks are fighting against us. The most important thing is to keep ... calm. We eliminated four tanks in a short amount of time. Approximately 20 Stukas dive bomb, howling from the skies, to attack the Russian tank line. By the afternoon, the battle is decided to our advantage. ... More than 60 enemy tanks stand burned out or crushed.”

The picture was repeated along the entire front. The same day, the Red Army lost over 100 tanks in a battle near Pruzhany and 150 tanks the following day near Vinnytsia. All counter-attacks were repulsed and the German panzer columns continued unabated. The Luftwaffe made also heavy inroads into Soviet units, as Polish Fred Virski witnessed:

“Suddenly I saw something dark, like a shadow, crossing the grey sky. I took careful aim with my sights, pulled the trigger. ... I knew I had no chance of harming planes flying at 3,000 metres, but this firing gave me the feeling that we were not defenceless. ... Beneath us there was pandemonium. We could see men rushing off into the fields. ... For a short interval the bombing stopped. Suddenly, from above us, came a whining noise. Quickly it grew into a scream. We knew this scream – the planes were diving.”

Along with hundreds of thousands of Soviet soldiers, Virski moved to the front. The Red Army command ordered all available forces to mobilise. They had to slow the German advance at any cost, long enough to establish defensive positions along the rivers that cut through the western Soviet Union. But in the years leading up to the war, the army leadership had focused exclusively on an offensive war against Germany. The Red Army was not ready for a defensive conflict. In the coming weeks, it would cost the lives of tens of thousands of Soviet soldiers. ■

Despite successive victories, Germany bled

On the surface, the German Army seemed invincible, but by 1941, its foundations had begun to falter. The army lacked weapons and spare parts.

Adolf Hitler had already planned the future of German war production before Barbarossa. Once victory was assured, the German war industry would no longer build tanks and rifles, but warships and submarines. The new weapons would be used to defeat the British Royal Navy and Royal Air Force.

Hitler’s armament plan, however, was built around one key expectation: that Stalin’s forces would be quickly defeated. Indeed, the German war industry in 1941 was not built for protracted conflicts, but for short campaigns in which enemy armies were surrounded and quickly wiped out. The tactic had worked well in Poland, Scandinavia and France, and Hitler naturally expected it to work against the Soviet Union, whose army he judged inferior to the French.

Germany was so confident of its own military capabilities that it had not fully converted production to armament. Many of the factories that produced

tanks for the German Army therefore still devoted manpower and resources to building cars for civilians. This meant that the Wehrmacht did not have enough trucks, tanks, machine guns and spare parts to take advantage of the initial victories over the Soviet Union. Only in 1942, when it was apparent that the war against the Soviet Union would drag on, did production shift, but it was too late.

The German war industry was also deeply dependent on a quick victory over the Soviet Union for other reasons. Germany was short of oil. In 1938 alone, German industry consumed 44 million barrels of oil, but produced only 3.8 million barrels itself. Although it was able to make synthetic oil, total production barely reached 13 million barrels. The remaining 31 million barrels had to be imported. It was therefore necessary to capture Soviet oil fields to keep the war machine going.

Factories in Germany were not converted to war production. This proved fatal.





THE SOVIET LINE COLLAPSED

With our faces contorted by anger, we jump into the Reds' shrapnel trenches. Anti-tank grenades hammer into their fortifications. All goes crazy.

Hans Roth, German soldier.

Eastern Front, June-July 1941



All over the Eastern Front, German soldiers stormed forward during the first weeks of the invasion. The Red Army was in disarray and on the verge of collapse.

The Soviet line collapsed

German tanks stormed through the Soviet Union, leaving the Red Army in total disarray. Desperate Soviet generals tried to slow the German advance with hopeless counter-attacks, resulting in casualties in the hundreds of thousands. By July 1941, Hitler was alarmingly close to securing Nazi dominance in Europe.

By Benjamin Christensen

There was complete panic among Soviet ranks at the end of June 1941. The German invasion had caught the Red Army by surprise, and hundreds of thousands of Soviet soldiers were on the run all along the front. They were no match for Hitler's panzer forces, which continued their rapid advance deep into the country.

Hans Roth, a private German soldier, went victoriously from one battle to the next in those early days, making diligent notes in his diary. By 24th June, he had reached the Soviet town of Babicz in the western part of what is now Ukraine.

"Encirclement of the enemy has been achieved by dawn and continues to close in, despite the desperate attempts by the Reds to break through ... The Russians run like maniacs against our lines ... Artillery fire has been ordered, and just minutes later, scores of heavy shells hiss and howl over our heads ... The entire valley swills from the impact of the shelling. We are able to reach the first buildings in Babicz under the cover of the well positioned fire ... With our faces contorted by anger, we jump into the Reds' shrapnel trenches. Anti-tank grenades hammer into their fortifications. All goes crazy now and chaos erupts ... Resistance from the Reds has been broken—an entire Red division has been destroyed.

"Clusters of dead and wounded soldiers are blocking the street. The number of our casualties is also high. We are so exhausted we could pass out. Despite this, we reassemble and continue to advance without any noteworthy resistance."

Defence line split by 100 km gap

The Red Army's commanders were left in complete disarray. On the central front, Soviet units had been surrounded in three large pockets around the towns of Bialystok, Navahrudak and Volkovysk, which were now slowly being crushed.

Between the northern and central fronts, a gaping hole of 100 kilometres had opened up in the Soviet lines, through which German panzer forces poured towards Minsk without encountering any significant resistance. The Soviet casualty figures made frightening reading for its commanders. On average, a Soviet soldier died every two seconds. In the north, the Baltic Army was losing 5,000

men a day, and in the south, 16,000 soldiers were dying daily in Ukraine. But the worst figures of all were on the central front in Belarus, where 23,000 Soviet soldiers lost their lives day after day. In addition, entire regiments, divisions and armies disappeared, surrounded and swallowed up by the advancing German units and forced to surrender.

The Germans, for their part, found the first days of fighting to be tougher and very different from the battles the soldiers had endured in Poland and through the campaign in France. As General Hermann Hoth noted, stubborn resistance from the Russians had forced the Germans to fight more traditional battles. Having been able to take chances in Poland and in the West, the Germans now had to be more cautious.

Even German privates like Hubert Hegele of the 1st Mountain Division in Army Group South had quickly realised that this was going to be a different war:

"It was difficult, more than difficult ... Will it always go on here like this? Many of our comrades

Panzer units and fast motorcycles spearheaded the German attack that brought the Red Army to the brink of collapse.

The Stahlhelm (Steel helmet) was produced by the millions and was standard equipment in the German army.



The helmet was designed to provide maximum protection against shrapnel.



have already been laid to rest in the burning Polish soil ... It takes me ages to fall asleep. The thoughts of the day, particularly of the horror at the castle gardens in Oleszyce, were simply too burdensome. And now a solemn stillness lies over the battlefield at the border. Above, in the cloudless night sky, there is the splendour of a million stars; on the earth, the white recognition flares of the Germans and the red flares of the Russians ... And tomorrow?"

Blitzkrieg threatened supply lines

The German units continued to advance in three directions according to plan: north through Lithuania towards Leningrad, in the centre through that 100-kilometre gap in the Soviet front line towards Minsk, and south towards the Ukrainian capital Kiev. But the deep thrusts were dangerous for the advancing troops, who often pushed forward quickly without the possibility of securing supply lines. The slow infantry had to provide this, while the motorised units pressed forward in haste, hoping to encircle and destroy as many Soviet armies as possible.

On the southern front, Private Hans Roth and his anti-tank unit had been in heavy fighting for several days. But there was no time for respite.

"What I would give to be able to sleep in! After only two hours of sleep we are back at it ... Our rapid advance in narrow wedge formation has

created a terrible situation for us: only the banks along the road are able to be cleansed of enemy troops. There is no time to comb the neighbouring forests, which is precisely, however, where the enemy combatants are reassembling. Time and time again there are small battles to the rear of the front line. Supply convoys are being attacked and obliterated by the enemy far behind our own line," Roth complained in his diary.

Roth and his comrades, however, were better off than their Soviet counterparts. Everywhere along the front the Red Army soldiers received hopeless and contradictory orders from their superiors. Joseph Stalin had ordered counter-attacks all along the front, but the units ►



German trains couldn't run in Russia

German Bernhard von Lossberg was the one of the men who drafted the military plans that underpinned Operation Barbarossa's blueprint. Of all the participants, he was the only one that took logistics into account.

Several plans for an invasion of the Soviet Union were drawn up by the Germans after the fall of France in the summer of 1940. The High Command's department responsible for military planning presented its own proposal on 19th September 1940 – a plan drawn up by Lieutenant Colonel Bernhard von Lossberg. The document has since become known as the Lossberg study.

Lossberg's plan divided the German force into three armies: two north of the Pripyat Marshes and one south. Unlike many of the

other officers who planned the invasion of the Soviet Union, Lieutenant Colonel Lossberg's planning accounted for the poor quality of the Soviet road and rail networks. Lossberg noted in his draft, for example, that "all German operations must be supported in their later stages by reliable Russian railways, because in the vast spaces a transport system based only on roads will be insufficient".

The problem for Lossberg and the German invasion plan was that the Soviet railways had a broader track gauge than Western European railways. German supply trains

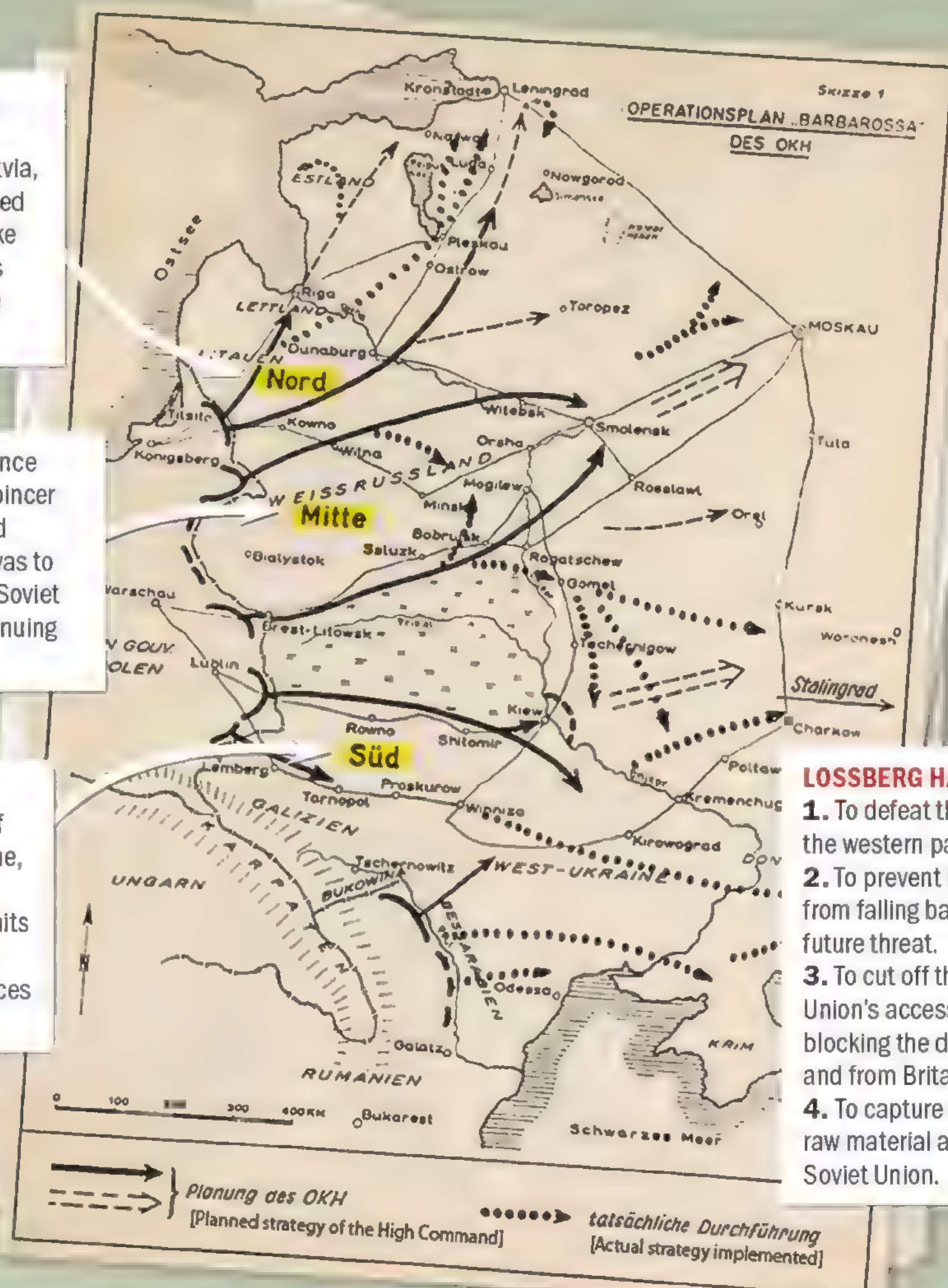
could therefore not run directly on Soviet railway lines.

Lossberg saw only two solutions to the challenge: one was to capture enough Soviet trains to transport materiel. The other was to rebuild the Soviet rail network to accommodate Western European trains. The first solution, however, was complicated by the fact that to ensure victory over the Red Army it would be necessary to bomb the trains before they brought Soviet reinforcements to the front, while the second solution would take an inordinately long time.

According to Lossberg's plan, **ONE ARMY** would advance through Lithuania towards Latvia, while part of the force bypassed Latvia and Estonia east of Lake Peipus in order to surround as many Soviet units as possible and reach Leningrad.

ANOTHER ARMY was to advance through Belarus in two great pincer manoeuvres, to be assembled around Smolensk. Their aim was to encircle and crush as large a Soviet force as possible before continuing on to Moscow.

THE THIRD ARMY would advance into Ukraine south of the Pripyat Marshes. In Ukraine, the force was tasked with defeating the strong Soviet units defending the Soviet Union's granary to secure vital resources for further warfare.



LOSSBERG HAD FOUR AIMS:

1. To defeat the main enemy force in the western part of the Soviet Union.
2. To prevent larger enemy forces from falling back and thus posing a future threat.
3. To cut off the western Soviet Union's access to the sea, thus blocking the direct supply routes to and from Britain and the US.
4. To capture important industrial and raw material areas in the western Soviet Union.

that were to carry out the attacks were either surrounded or lacked artillery and air support. It was complete chaos. Some units, for example, had been ordered both to attack and to hold their positions. Officers, fearing for their lives if they did not follow Stalin's orders, ordered desperate counter-attacks that cost thousands of soldiers their lives.

Despite heavy losses, General Ryabyshev's VIII Mechanised Corps was one of the few units to recapture some lost ground on the southern front. But the next morning counter-orders came from the top, and the corps had to give up their dearly bought territory. Later in the day another counter-order came, and the counter-attack was now to be resumed. But Ryabyshev's units were exhausted and unable to mount another assault. The situation prompted the Political Commissar of the Southern Front, Nikolai Vashugin, to troop to the general's headquarters:

"How much did you sell yourself for, Judas?"

Ryabyshev tried to explain, but was interrupted:

"You will be heard by military tribunal, traitor. Right here, under this fir, we'll hear you out, and right here we'll shoot you."

The general recounted in a trembling voice how his units had first captured land through hard fighting, which they had then been ordered to abandon, and that most of his force now had to be reorganised before they could attack again. A counter-attack could not be launched until the following morning, he argued.

"You have 20 minutes to report your decision," hissed the political commissar in response before giving Ryabyshev his choice: launch an immediate offensive or be court-martialled.

Fearing for his life, Ryabyshev agreed to send a few units to counter-attack the enemy near the town of Dubno. To this Commissar Vashugin dryly remarked:

"If you take Dubno by evening, you'll get a medal. If you don't, you'll be expelled from the Party and shot."

Against all odds, Ryabyshev's exhausted units managed to capture the city – only to be later surrounded and destroyed. Even to a fanatical commissar like Vashugin, it was obvious that the situation was hopeless. He went to his superior, the future Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, and told him that the Soviet Union would soon fall and that he would shoot himself. Khrushchev replied icily:

"Why are you talking foolishness? If you've decided to shoot yourself, what are you waiting for?"

Vashugin then immediately drew his pistol and shot himself. The commissar was far from alone in choosing this option during the early days of the invasion. Masses of soldiers chose to wound themselves in desperation. Soviet correspondent Vasily Grossman, for example, recalled *"how happy and excited are the faces of wounded soldiers when they return from the battle"*, to which a divisional



The Red Army fled from the Germans all along the front line. Even soldiers who had entrenched themselves could not hold out.

commander replied *"with a sardonic grin, 'Especially the faces of those wounded in the left hand.'"*

The Soviet security service NKVD responded by executing soldiers with such injuries on the spot. Compassionate military doctors found themselves forced to amputate the entire arms of soldiers with self-inflicted wounds before the injuries could be checked by the security services.

Soviet soldiers were sacrificed

For the Soviet High Command it was a question of slowing down the German advance at any cost. The Red Army desperately needed to buy time to mobilise and organise its defences into two major lines before it was overrun. Machines and other equipment from the large industrial areas in the west were hastily packed up and sent by train to the east, where the machines could be reassembled and production resumed. But that took time – time that had to be won by sacrificing tens of thousands of Soviet soldiers' lives in hopeless suicide missions all along the front.

Soviet journalist Konstantin Simonov was at the front in the early days, reporting eagerly for both Soviet and foreign newspapers. In one of his articles, he commented on the wording used by Soviet propaganda.

"Our covering forces, moving into counter-attack, detain the enemy until our main forces can arrive." We have often read this modest, business-like phrase in reports from the Informburo," Simonov explained. *"But not everyone has a clear ▶*

FACTS

For Operation Barbarossa, the Germans were helped by a large contingent of Finns and Romanians. **Up to 500,000 Finns** took part in the invasion of the Soviet Union, while the **Romanians were able to muster around 365,000.**

Motorcycles travelled swiftly, giving the German forces greater mobility than the Red Army. But when winter came, that advantage fell away.

idea of what is hidden by that phrase, what bravery and iron fortitude stand behind the simple words 'detain the enemy until our main forces can arrive'. Military language is laconic. The order says 'detain the enemy'. But in our army 'detain' means 'detain at any cost'. The word 'fight' in our army means 'fight until your last drop of blood'.

"Covering forces are those units that take the enemy's first blow, that first feel out his strategy and tactics, that first discover new methods of fighting

him, learning as they go, in combat. They detain the enemy, they make mistakes that often cost dearly, they correct those mistakes and accrue new combat experience which today and tomorrow will be used by the whole army to destroy the enemy."

Communication failed

The situation was also hopeless for the Soviet pilots in the air, who took up the fight in obsolete aircraft against a powerful – if numerically smaller –



If you've decided to shoot yourself,
what are you waiting for? ■ Nikita Khrushchev, future leader of the Soviet Union.

Luftwaffe. In desperation at the inferiority of their aircraft, Soviet pilots had begun targeting German aircraft with their own planes in suicidal attacks rather than attempting to shoot them down. In the first weeks of the invasion alone, 358 aerial torpedo attacks took place.

At the same time, most lines of communication had been destroyed by saboteurs and bombs during the first days of the invasion, and the generals had completely lost contact with the units at the front. And

even where there was contact, the information coming from the front wasn't always trusted. For example, when the 11th Soviet Army under General Vasily Morozov was surrounded in Lithuania, Morozov sent telegram after telegram to his superior, General Fyodor Kuznetsov, who was located 500 km away from the front in the city of Pskov. After receiving the increasingly desperate telegrams, General Kuznetsov turned to an army veteran of four wars:

"What do you think?" the general asked.

"The army is in a tough situation," the veteran replied. *"They are encircled..."*

"You haven't understood a thing!" Kuznetsov yelled. *"Can a disciplined and tactful person like Morozov be sending me rude cables like that?"*

"He might, if the circumstances forced him," the veteran replied diplomatically, but General Kuznetsov had already made up his mind.

"Morozov would not write this way. These cables are from the Germans. The Eleventh's staff must have been captured."

The general refused to help the 11th Army and the thousands of soldiers caught in the Germans' trap. The army was thus condemned to destruction.

Things worsened in the weeks ahead, as Finland threw herself into the fight against the Soviet Union in the hope of reclaiming territory lost during the Winter War. Here it proved little consolation to Stalin that the Finns had no desire to regain more than what they had lost. Finland was not Germany's ally, according to its commander-in-chief Marshal Mannerheim, but merely Hitler's *"fellow traveller in a war which Finland is waging for its own active defence"*.

Disaster in Belarus

One of the first major targets for the Germans was the Belarusian capital, Minsk. Stalin had insisted on defending the city, even though it had no particular military importance, resulting in 700,000 troops being assigned to defend the city.

In Belarus, the Red Army also possessed a large armoured force of nearly 1,000 tanks, including many of the new KV-1 and T-34 tanks, which were superior to most German tanks. When word came that a large German armoured force was assembling near Grodno, 250 km west of Minsk, the tank force was immediately sent there, but the order led to disaster. Hundreds of tanks did not even reach the front but had to be left in ditches because they ran out of fuel due to German air raids wiping out many of the Soviet supply depots.

By the end of June 1941, the Germans had completely surrounded hundreds of thousands of Soviet soldiers in a pocket around Minsk. Although many thousands of Soviet soldiers managed to escape, the closure of the Minsk pocket was a disaster for the Red Army. The fighting in Belarus alone in the first weeks of Operation Barbarossa had now cost the ►



STRENGTH RATIO

German superiority was clearly demonstrated in the Battle of Minsk in Belarus where, over the course of just 17 days, the Red Army lost up to

420,000

men. By comparison, the Germans lost only about

12,000

soldiers.



MEDIUM TANK

Panzer III

The blitzkrieg's armoured workhorse

The Panzer III was in the vanguard as Germany unleashed its feared blitzkrieg on the battlefield. The tank was designed to fight both infantry and tanks, which represented a whole new way of thinking about warfare.

In 1934, Hitler ordered the German war industry to develop a new type of tank that could break through enemy lines and penetrate deep behind the front line. The tank would be capable of fighting both infantry and enemy tanks. The answer was the Panzer III,

which became the workhorse of the German armoured forces for much of the war.

Using tanks to fight other tanks was a completely new idea. Until now, this task had been left to specialist units armed with anti-tank guns and anti-tank rifles. The Panzer III

was used from the beginning of the war until the final battles in many different places and in many different ways. From the frozen swamps of the Soviet Union to the scorching desert of North Africa, the Panzer III was a permanent fixture in the German war effort.

AWKWARD TO REPAIR:

If the gear system of the Panzer III was damaged, the turret and the top of the chassis had to be separated from the rest of the tank before the gear system could be lifted out with a large crane, a difficult task in the field.

MACHINE GUNS:

In addition to the main gun, the Panzer III carried 2-3 machine guns. One mounted in the chassis, one in the turret and in some cases a third mounted on top of the turret for firing at enemy aircraft.

FLAMETHROWER:

In some versions of the Panzer III the main gun was replaced by a flamethrower, used against fortified positions such as bunkers and machine gun emplacements.



The Panzer III was later developed into Sturmgeschütz III (Assault gun III), which was a turretless self-propelled gun.

RADIO GAVE THE UPPER

HAND: Unlike the Soviet tanks, the Panzer III was equipped with a radio. This meant that even in the heat of battle, commanders could coordinate their units' efforts on the battlefield.

PANZER III WAS WELDED TOGETHER: The Panzer III was one of the first tanks to be welded rather than riveted together. Welding meant less weight as there was no need for a frame to rivet the armour plates to.

GUN: Early versions of the Panzer III were armed with a 37-mm anti-tank gun, which was the preferred anti-tank gun of the German army at the beginning of the war. The gun proved inadequate against Russian T-34 and KV-1 tanks. Later, the Panzer III was upgraded with a 50-mm gun.

It seems like the fighting in the East will be over in four to six weeks. ■ Adolf B, German physician.



Prisoners of war.
Over five million Soviet soldiers forced to surrender to the German superpower.

Soviet Union 420,000 troops, nearly 5,000 tanks, 10,000 guns and heavy mortars, and over 1,600 aircraft. By comparison, the attacking Germans had suffered only a fraction of those losses.

The Germans approached Moscow

In early July, German forces approached Smolensk on the direct route to Moscow. All the Germans had to do now was cross the Dnieper River. They did not expect much resistance, as they had taken so many prisoners around Minsk. It therefore came as a surprise to everyone when a pilot returned from a reconnaissance mission with the following message:

"Strong enemy armoured columns with at least 100 heavy tanks advancing along both sides of Borisov-Orsha-Smolensk road in the area of Orsha. Among them very heavy, hitherto unobserved models."

"Where do they come from? These Russians seem to have nine lives." a German general asked, shaking his head in disbelief.

An unnamed German soldier noted in his war diary the several days of armoured combat that followed:

"Russian tank attack on the near side of Tolochino. One of their tanks got stuck in the forest. Sergeant Findeisen with men of 6th and 7th Companies finished it off with close-combat weapons. Ten T-26s

appeared in front of our lines, on the motor highway. Second Lieutenant Isenbeck, leading a Panzerjäger platoon, blocked the road with a 5-cm anti-tank gun. The Russian tanks were advancing well spaced out. Isenbeck knelt by his gun, firing shell after shell. The leading T-26 was on fire. The second slewed into the roadside ditch. The third one, its track shot to pieces, stood motionless by the side of the road, a sitting duck. Change of target. Fire! Five more tanks were knocked out. The ninth was hit just below its turret at 30 yards' range and was now blazing like a torch. The tenth, behind it, was able to turn and get away by zigzagging wildly."

From the other side of the front, Soviet General Andry Yeryomenko recounted his soldiers' reaction to the initial attacks by the German panzer forces.

"The Germans attacked with large armoured formations, often with infantrymen riding on the tanks. Our infantry were not prepared for that. At the shout 'Enemy tanks!' our companies, battalions, and even entire regiments scuttled to and fro ... They lost their ability to manoeuvre, their combat readiness was diminished, and all operational control, contact, and cooperation were rendered impossible,"

Although the German panzer forces were superior and the Soviet units surrendered in quick ►

The shocking roads, the heat, and the dust were more dangerous enemies than the Red Army. ■ Heinz Guderian, German general.



The MP 40 was erroneously nicknamed "Schmeisser" after the designer of the MP 18.

The Germans produced over one million MP 40 submachine guns.

The machine gun could fire around 500 rounds per minute.

succession, the Germans encountered surprises. The German commanders had expected weak resistance from the Soviet armoured units, which they believed were equipped with obsolete tanks.

They were therefore completely unprepared when their units ran into the new T-34 tanks. Developed under the strictest secrecy, these state-of-the-art tanks were the first to feature sloping armour, giving the vehicles good protection and a low silhouette, making them hard to both see and hit. In addition, the tanks were lightning fast and their wide belts were perfectly designed for driving over the Russian terrain's varying surfaces of deep mud, loose gravel and rocks.

Early in the morning of 8th July 1941, units of the 17th Panzer Division encountered the new Soviet tanks for the first time near Senno. All day long the two tank forces fired at each other, and the battlefield was strewn with burning tanks.

At about 17.00 all German units received word that they were to conserve ammunition, but at the same moment, Westphal, a German radio operator aboard one of the tanks heard his officer shouting a warning:

"Heavy enemy tank! Turret 10 o'clock. Armour-piercing shell. Fire!"

The tank's gunner fired the gun, and seconds later the message followed:

"Direct hit!"

Nevertheless, the Soviet T-34 tank continued unabated. Even when Westphal's tank fired at its sides, where the tank's armour was much thinner, it failed to inflict significant damage. The shots simply bounced off. Only when the Soviet tank got stuck in a small bog, and heavy German artillery could fire on it, was it finally put out of action.

Fortunately for the German tank commanders, their Soviet opponents still used the T-34 tanks poorly in the summer of 1941. They were mostly deployed in small groups that were quickly overwhelmed by concentrated German firepower. In addition, few Soviet tanks had radios, and crews had to

communicate with flags, while German tanks had internal radio systems, allowing units to work closely together while the enemy fought almost blindly.

The Germans crossed the Dnieper

Although the first weeks of fighting had been hard, the German soldiers' courage was still high, as a letter from field medic Adolf B testified:

"It seems like the fighting in the East will be over in four to six weeks. Like many of my comrades and acquaintances, I would be delighted if our division were then allowed to return to Germany. And then never again to Russia! ... We've already advanced farther east than any other unit ... We've already passed by many German settlements (former Frisians and Dutch) ... Tomorrow will be my third birthday in the field."

For several days, General Guderian and his armoured forces had stood on the banks of the Dnieper waiting for permission to cross. But his superiors would not sign off until the infantry had caught up with the tanks to support the attack. In despair, the general asked his chief of staff:

"What's your opinion, Liebenstein? Shall we continue our thrust and force the Dnieper with armour alone, or do we have to wait for the infantry divisions to catch up with us?"

Guderian wanted to cross the river immediately but was refused. Soon after, he made a desperate phone call to his superiors, shouting into the receiver:

"You're throwing away our victory!"

Finally, on the evening of 9th July, the general received the green light, and the next morning he crossed the river. Within a few days he'd surrounded ►



Soviet resistance was far fiercer than that previously encountered in France and Poland by the Germans. Nevertheless, they succeeded in advancing.



The most important objective to be achieved before the onset of winter is not the capture of Moscow but the seizure of the Crimea. ■ Adolf Hitler.



Fierce urban warfare, in which the defenders were willing to sacrifice everything, was one of the major challenges facing the German invasion forces on the Eastern Front.

the large city of Smolensk and cut off a direct line to Moscow for the 15 Soviet divisions defending the city. Another huge pocket of Soviet troops was crushed before the end of July. 760,000 Soviet soldiers were either killed, wounded or captured, and over 3,000 tanks, 900 aircraft and 3,000 guns were destroyed. Most importantly for the Germans, the road to Moscow was now wide open. There were no longer any great rivers blocking the way. Moscow was ready to fall. Army Group Centre just awaited the Führer's approval to launch the final, decisive push against the Soviet capital.

The tanks were worn down

Before the attack could begin, however, the German army had to rest. Several weeks of fighting had taken their toll on the German soldiers and their equipment, as General Schaal noted:

"The shocking roads, the heat, and the dust were more dangerous enemies than the Red Army. The tanks were enveloped in thick clouds of dust. The dust and grit wore out the engines. The filters were continually clogged up with dirt. Oil-consumption

became too heavy for supplies to cope with. Engines got overheated and pitons seized up. In this manner the 10th Panzer Division lost the bulk of its heavy Mark IV tanks on the way to Yelnya.

"The men of the maintenance units and engineer officers worked like Trojans. But they were short of spares. And the spares did not arrive because... the distances from the army stores had become too great. Every single ammunition or supply convoy lost about a third of its vehicles en route, either through breakdown or through enemy ambushes. Not only the machines but the men too were overtaxed. It would happen, for instance, that parts of a column on the march failed to move off again after a short rest because its officers and men had dropped off into a comatose sleep."

Despite difficult conditions and hard fighting, the German army had achieved most of its objectives for the first part of the invasion. The Germans had crushed the Soviet armies in the west before they could retreat to safety, and their armies were now ready to march on Moscow and capture the Soviet capital before winter set in. On the evening of 21st August 1941, word finally

reached the senior commanders of Army Group Centre who were waiting the order to advance on Moscow. They were surprised to receive a different message from Hitler: *"The most important objective to be achieved before the onset of winter is not the capture of Moscow but the seizure of the Crimea."*

The generals were shocked.

"What can we do against this decision?" Field Marshal Fedor von Bock, Army Group Centre's commander, asked. The head of the German Army High Command, Franz Halder, was present, but could only shake his head and confirm: *"It is immutable."*

The well-liked Colonel General Heinz Guderian was shocked by the Führer's decision:

"We've got to upset it. If we head for Kiev first we shall inevitably get involved in a winter campaign before we can reach Moscow. What the roads and our supply difficulties will be like then I shudder to think. I doubt that our tanks are up to the strain. My Panzer corps, especially XXIV Corps, have not had a single day's rest since the beginning of the campaign."

Hitler stood firm on his decision

Before long, Guderian had flown to Hitler, where he presented his thoughts directly to the Führer:

"Moscow cannot be compared with Paris or Warsaw, my Führer. Moscow is not only the head and the heart of the Soviet Union. It is also its communications centre, its political brain, an important industrial area, and above all it is the hub of the transport system of the whole Red empire. The fall of Moscow will decide the war. Stalin knows this. He knows that the fall of Moscow would mean his final defeat. And because he knows this he will employ his entire military strength before Moscow ... Once we have defeated the enemy's main forces before Moscow and in Moscow, and once we have eliminated the Soviet Union's main marshalling yard, the Baltic area and the Ukrainian industrial region will fall to us much more readily."

In a razor-sharp voice Hitler replied:

"We need the grain of the Ukraine. The industrial area of the Donets must work for us, instead of for Stalin. The Russian oil-supplies from the Caucasus must be cut off, so that his military strength withers away. Above all, we must gain control of the Crimea in order to eliminate this dangerous aircraft carrier operating against the Romanian oilfields."

The generals' arguments were to no avail – the Führer had made up his mind. The attack would continue against Ukraine and Kiev. Only then could the focus return to Moscow, whose defenders would now have all the time they needed to prepare their positions. Guderian knew that the task now facing the German army had suddenly become far more difficult, if not downright impossible. ■

NEWS FROM THE FRONT:



The Philadelphia Inquirer

14th July 1941

Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev Doomed, Nazis Say

Reds Claim Victories, Admit 250,000 losses.

MOSCOW: Buoyed by a new mutual assistance pact with Great Britain, the Soviet Union today announced a series of gigantic all-day battles with the German invaders in the Pskov, Vitebsk and Novograd Volynski areas – the distant approaches to Leningrad, Moscow and Kiev.

Reporting that in the Sunday-long fighting the Germans had lost new masses of men and materiel, the Soviet Information Bureau declared:

"In three weeks of heavy fighting the Germans have lost more than 1,000,000 men killed and wounded, while the Soviet forces have lost not more than 250,000."

Heavy tank losses

The Germans have lost more than 2,300 aircraft and over 3,000 tanks, the communiqué said, and the Russians 2,200 tanks and 1,900 planes. German planes destroyed Saturday totalled 131, it said.

Vitebsk is about 300 miles west of Moscow; Pskov is at the southern tip of Lake Peipus 150 miles south-west of Leningrad; and Novograd Volynski is 120 miles west of Kiev in the Ukraine.

All up and down the front the Russian communiqué told of a day of bitter fighting, mentioning particularly that in the north-west –

the Leningrad defence area – troops under Marshal Klementi Voroshilov checked the Germans and by staunch resistance repulsed them with heavy losses at some points.

Some panzer units reported 60 miles beyond Stalin Line

BERLIN: The fall of Leningrad and Kiev, second and third cities in Russia, is "imminent" and Moscow lies unprotected in the path of the German war machine ... the official DNB agency boasted tonight.

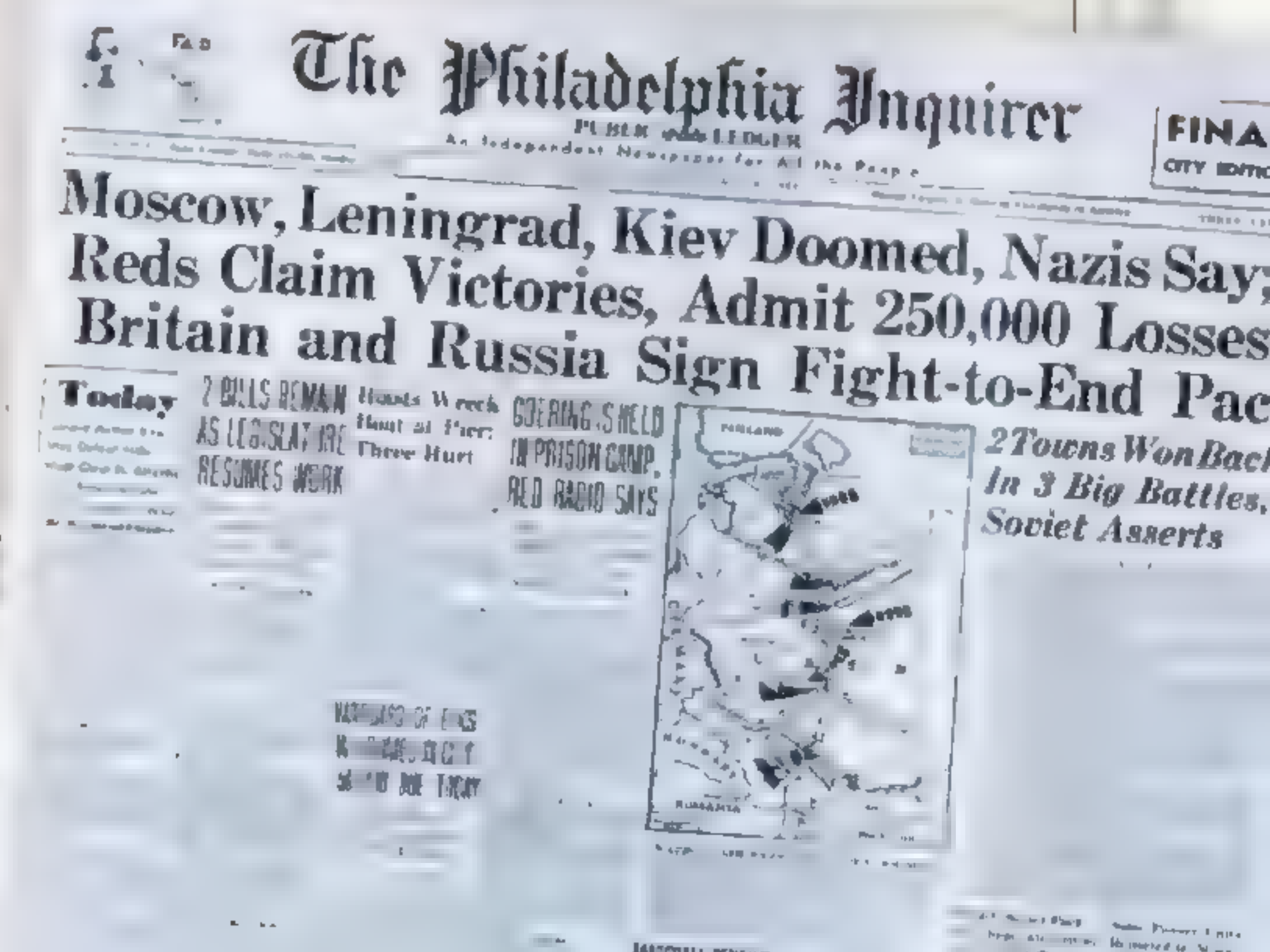
"Moscow is now as vulnerable as Paris was last year when Weygand's line was broken," a spokesman said. The smashing of the Stalin Line of steel and concrete "now assures a complete victory of German arms in the east", DNB said.

The agency's account pictured a collapse of Russian resistance and an impending catastrophe crushing Russia's vast armed forces and yielding Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev to Adolf Hitler.

100 miles from Leningrad

Leningrad ... is "immediately threatened" by German Panzer forces pressing upon it from the south ... according to Nazi reports. The Ukrainian capital of Kiev, once the capital of all Russia, is expected to be "occupied imminently" by German forces which have struck eastward... and "close before" Kiev, it was stated.

The Soviet Union desperately tried to trick the world into believing that the Germans were exaggerating the Red Army's casualty figures.



How German logistics worked

WAR MACHINE was insatiable

Supplying more than three million men across a 3,000-km front was a huge task that the German logistical corps struggled to solve.

As Operation Barbarossa began, the German general staff looked hopefully to the huge logistics corps responsible for supplying advancing armies with everything from hand soap to new gearboxes for tanks. The task of supplying more than 3.5 million troops advancing into the Soviet Union in June 1941 was enormous. Across a front almost 3,000 km wide, panzer divisions advanced at unprecedented speed, and their insatiable need for fuel and spare parts demanded that all logistics of the operation were worked out to the last detail. At the same time, ordinary soldiers advancing by truck, bicycle and on foot required enormous quantities of supplies: food was essential, of course, as was ammunition, but razor blades, different types of camouflaged uniforms, soap, cigarettes, mail and a myriad of other items also had to be transported quickly to the front line, which on some days advanced by 100 km.

A single logistics corps could be responsible for supplying troops along a front line several kilometres wide, and trucks carrying supplies therefore drove at regular speed from large depots further from the front to smaller depots near the battalions they were to supply.

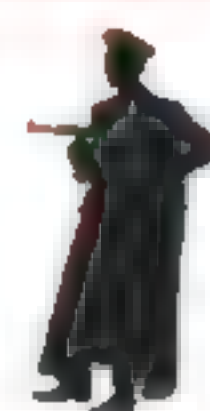
The sheer distances and numbers of soldiers made the logistics operation unlike anything the German army had attempted before. On top of that, the Russian railroad tracks were wider than the German ones, so rail transport was difficult, while dust from the poor Soviet roads quickly proved damaging, especially to vehicle gearboxes. Later came autumn and the swampy terrain, which not only slowed the German advance, but also made the task of the supply troops even more difficult. The fact that the German troops were nevertheless, for the most, part relatively well supplied right up to December 1941 testifies to the efficiency and skill with which the German logistical corps operated.

A German soldier usually carried *Halbieserne* (iron rations) with **300 grams** of tinned food and 150 g of hard bread.

Daily consumption at rest

- The German army comprised infantry and armoured divisions with different supply needs. The infantry divisions were the largest and required the most supplies, and even when they were stationary at the front, each of the divisions still needed as much as 80 tonnes (t) of supplies every single day.

- **17,200 men**
- **80 t supplies**



- **14,373 men**
- **30 t supplies**



Daily consumption in battle

- The panzer divisions were more difficult to keep supplied despite their lower consumption. The reason was that they started the day in one place and by the end of the day could be more than 30 kilometres away, forcing supply troops to deliver tonnes of food and supplies over ever-growing distances.

- **1,100 t supplies**
- **10 km per day**



- **700 t supplies**
- **30 km per day**

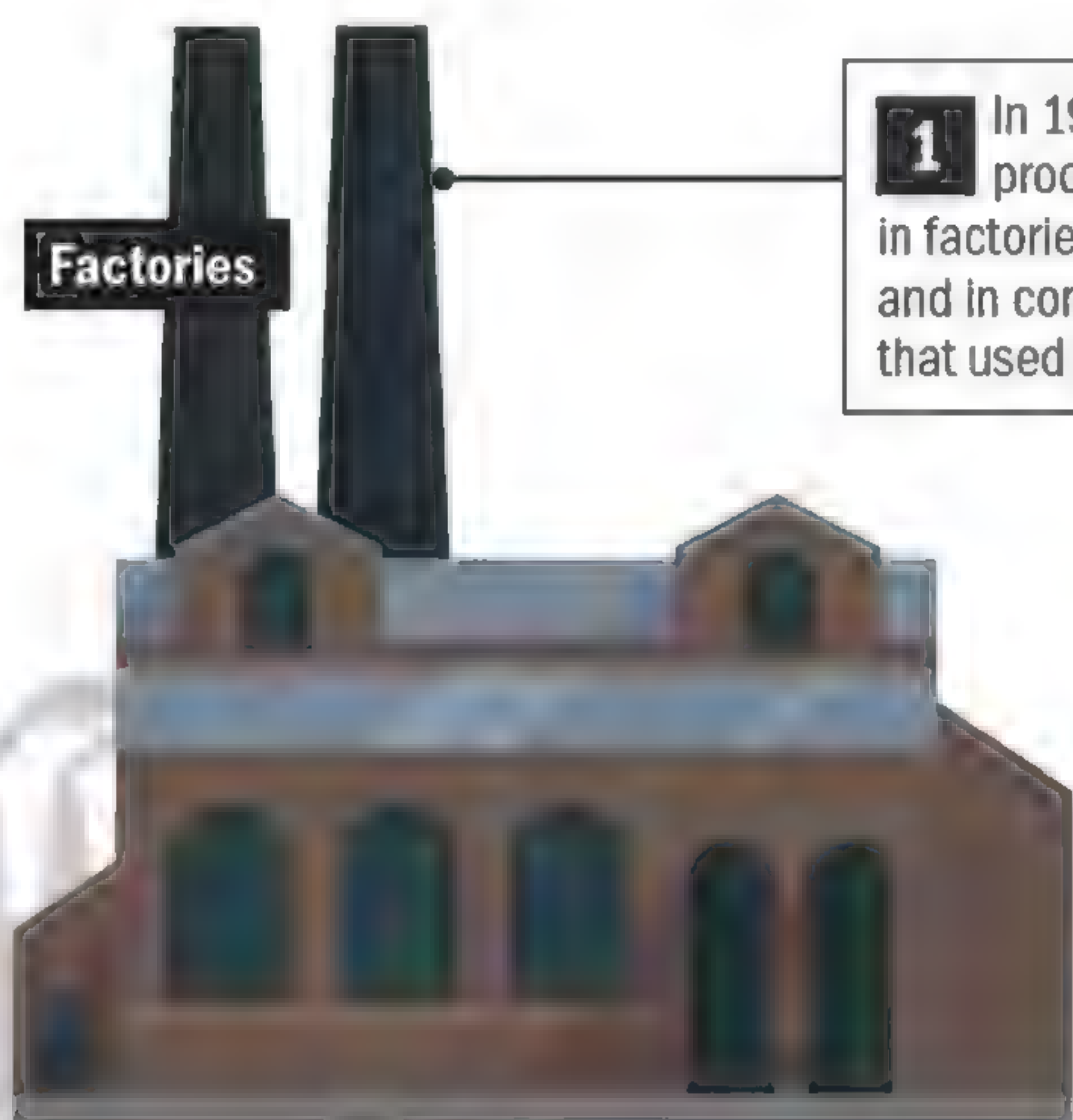


FACTORIES

worked around the clock

German factories worked at full speed to produce goods for the soldiers at the front. Most of the equipment was produced in the Third Reich and had to be transported long distances to the Soviet Union.

One of the largest German war production sites was at the concentration camp at **Auschwitz, Poland.**



Factories

1 In 1941, war production took place in factories in the Third Reich and in concentration camps that used forced labour.

Goods produced

- Ammunition
- Soap
- Uniforms
- Razor blades
- Tinned food
- Bandages
- Medicine
- Cigarettes



War Depot

2 The goods were then collected in a war depot, safely located within the Third Reich's borders. From there, transport to the front began.

Transport within the Third Reich was by truck, and the first leg to the front was by rail.



Despite a sustained effort, the logistics companies could not keep the panzer divisions fully supplied with fuel.



Forward Depot

3 The supplies then reached forward depots, which were close to the railway network and at the same time close to the front, but still far enough away to be safe.

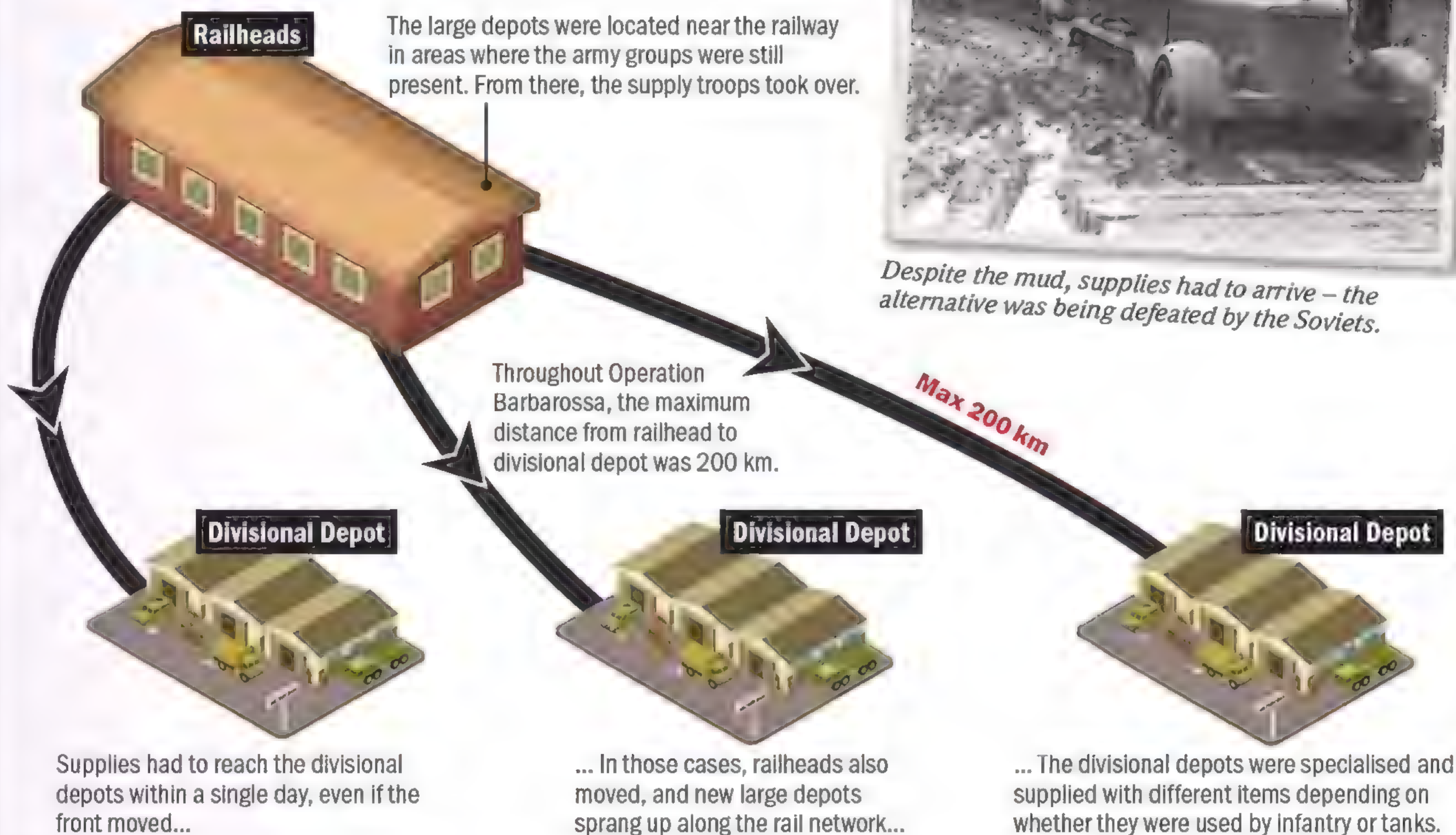
SUPPLY TRUCKS

coped with the muddy roads

Supplies were collected in large depots in the area where the rear of the army groups were located, and then sent by truck to the front line and the combat areas.



Despite the mud, supplies had to arrive – the alternative was being defeated by the Soviets.



Opel Blitz was the Germans' packhorse

Around
130,000
Opel Blitz trucks were produced during the war. Production died out in 1944 when the Allies bombed German factories.

The Opel Blitz was solid and reliable, but like all vehicles on the Eastern Front, it often got stuck in mud.



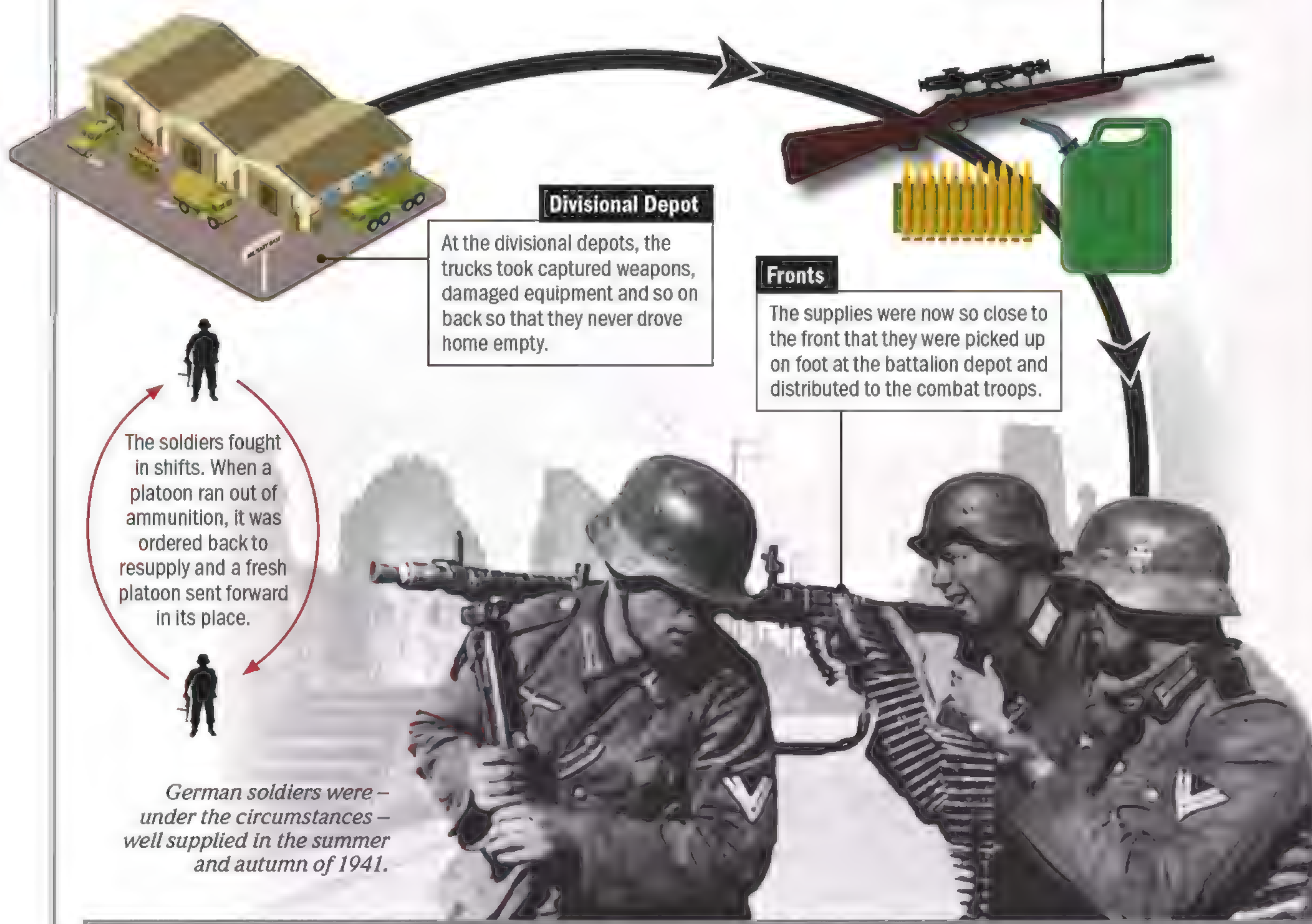
The Opel Blitz truck was a two-tonne vehicle. It could travel 405 km on a single tank of diesel, meaning supply depots had to be within 200km, so that the trucks could complete a return trip without refuelling.

With a top speed of 80 km/h the trip could be completed in five hours – on good terrain. In reality, drivers often drove for an entire day without rest.

SOLDIERS

did the rest

From the divisional depots, supplies had only a short way to travel to the front. The aim was for German soldiers to be fully supplied with ammunition at all times while fighting, so battles were often fought in shifts.



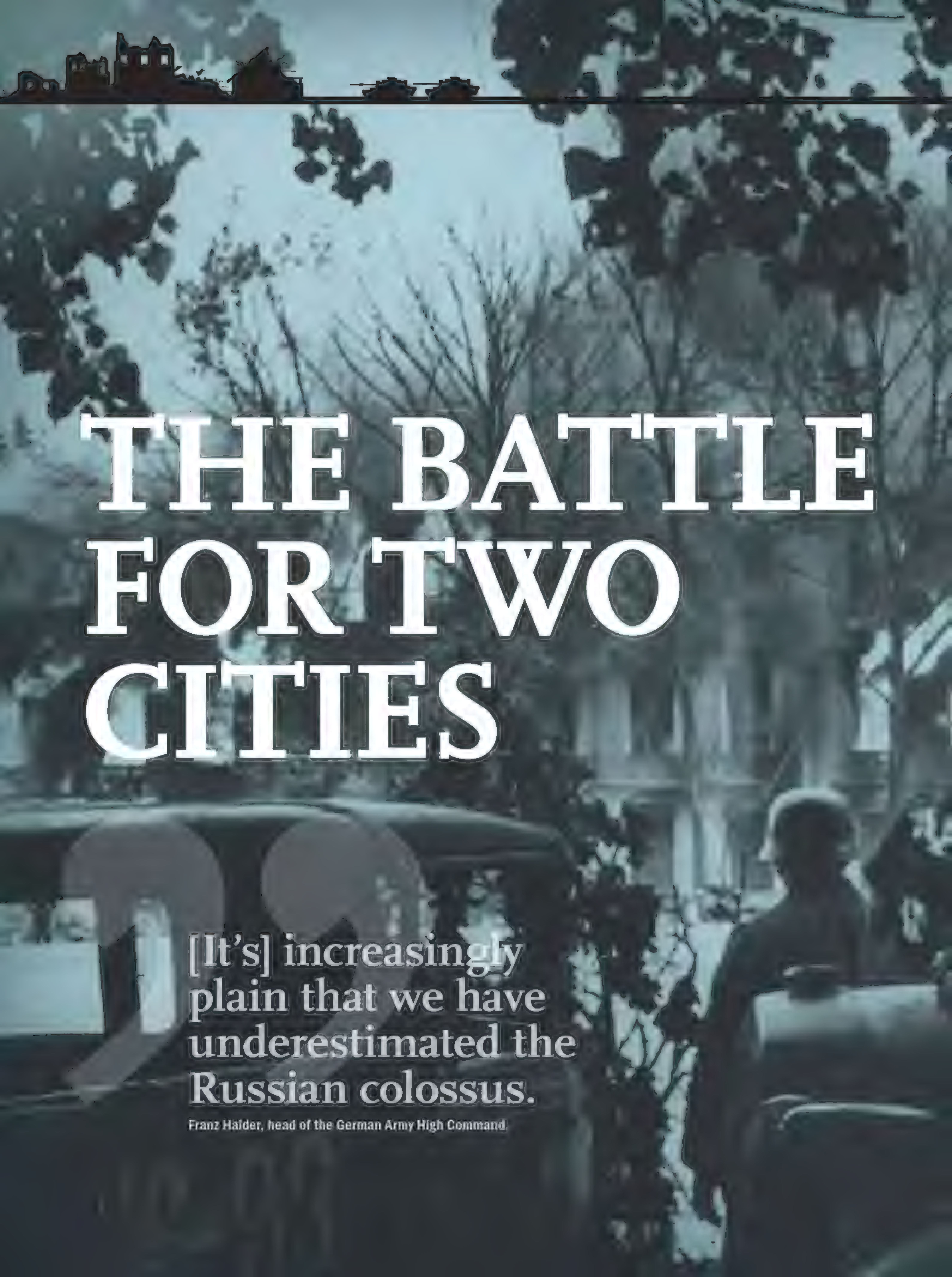
Germans broke all records

Although the Barbarossa campaign was probably lost due to lack of supplies, the German logistics companies actually worked extremely efficiently and managed, under extremely difficult circumstances, to supply troops much faster than both the Soviets and the Americans. In the battle for the Minsk pocket in June 1941, for example, two

panzer divisions advanced as much as 300 km in seven days, more than 40 km a day. The advance was only possible with good supplies of fuel and ammunition. By comparison, as late as 1944, US troops were required to advance a maximum of 75 km in five days, or an average of 15 km a day, to allow the supply troops to keep up.

DAILY SUPPLY RANGE

• Germany		200 km
• USA		15 km
• USSR		100 km



THE BATTLE FOR TWO CITIES

[It's] increasingly
plain that we have
underestimated the
Russian colossus.

Franz Halder, head of the German Army High Command

Smolensk and Kiev, August-September 1941



The attack on the cities of Smolensk and Kiev provided the first warning to the Germans that fighting on the Eastern Front would be tougher than anything they'd experienced before.

The battle for two cities

The Red Army hastily attempted to establish defences at the strategically crucial cities of Kiev and Smolensk. The army knew it wasn't strong enough to prevent the cities from falling. But fighting there might just buy enough time to build defences at Moscow as well as move vital Soviet heavy industry further east.

By Else Christensen

Frantz Halder, chief of staff of the German Army High Command, had good reason to be satisfied when he sat down to write his diary on 3rd July 1941. The first few weeks of Operation Barbarossa had confirmed everything he, the German high command and the Nazi propaganda machine had previously assumed about the Soviet enemy. It was clear the Red Army and its soldiers were vastly inferior to the Wehrmacht. No one, Halder believed, could be in any doubt that a German victory lay ahead – and not that far ahead at that.

“Thus, it is probably no exaggeration to say that the campaign against Russia has been won within a fortnight,” Halder wrote. However, the chief of staff didn't want to appear too presumptuous. The initial success of the campaign didn't mean that the war was already over, he stressed.

“The sheer geographical vastness of the country and the stubbornness of the resistance, which is carried on by all means, will claim our efforts for many more weeks to come,” he added with a note of caution.

Halder's initial assumption that the war would last only a few weeks would soon prove to be unfounded. But Halder's words about the Soviet Union's tenacious resistance were prophetic. In the weeks and months to follow, the Red Army would do everything in its power

to slow down the German *Heer* (Army). As yet, Stalin had neither the manpower nor the materiel to halt the rapid advance of German panzer forces, but he could delay the Germans and thus make it possible to fortify the capital, Moscow, plus save the strong and thriving Soviet industry – two aims that would be crucial to the Soviet state's continued ability to wage war. The plan had to succeed, and no price would be too high – as the coming battles between the poorly armed, fearful Soviets and the invincible German tank divisions in and around Smolensk and Kiev would soon reveal. For it was there in those two key cities that the Red Army marshalled its first dogged defence.

Confusion reigned at the front

Neither the Germans nor the Soviets yet knew what to expect when German troops marched on Smolensk, the capital of Smolensk Oblast in western Russia, in early July. Capturing Smolensk was a natural move for the German army. The city lay on the Dnieper River on the route known in Europe as the Smolensk Gate. The 'gate' formed a natural approach from the west to Moscow. For centuries, the flat lowlands that separate the Dvina and Dnieper rivers, some 80 kilometres wide and populated by sparse forest, had provided a traversable passage for European armies during their invasions of Russia. Polish forces took this route in the 17th century, for example, while Napoleon also passed through Smolensk during his fateful campaign in 1812.

Hitler was now determined to capture Smolensk and thus secure another foothold on the road to Moscow. At the front of the advance were *Panzergruppe 2* (2nd Panzer Group) under General Heinz Guderian and *Panzergruppe 3* under General Hermann Hoth, and the plan was to capture Smolensk in a pincer movement. The two forces would attack from the north and south respectively before meeting up east of the city in the area around Yartsevo and Yelnya. On 2nd July, Stalin appointed Marshal Semyon Timoshenko to stop the Germans and defend the entire Western Front. The marshal had established a close friendship with Stalin when, during the Russian Civil War in 1920, he commanded a cavalry regiment and Stalin was responsible for the defence of the city of Tsaritsyn, later Stalingrad.

Now one of the Soviet leader's most trusted officers, Timoshenko was also the newly appointed chairman

For centuries, the city of Smolensk provided a gateway to Russia. When Napoleon invaded in 1812, he, like Hitler, had to capture the area before he could move on.



of the Stavka, the armed forces' general staff. Timoshenko had an almost impossible task, and things went awry from the start. Mobilisation was chaotic. Transporting two of Timoshenko's armies – the 16th and the 19th – by rail from Ukraine ended in mass confusion. The numerous troop movements created traffic jams on the lines, while repeated Luftwaffe attacks disrupted operations. As a result, many train carriages with men and equipment were unable reach their destination, forced instead to divert to other stations. Some units were completely cut off from the outside world. In the confusion, commanders and officers were often separated from their soldiers, leaving them without orders or direction.

The chaotic start had consequences. On 6th July, when Timoshenko attacked Panzergruppe 3 from the area around the city of Vitebsk, the Germans counter-attacked and succeeded not only in breaking through Soviet lines but also in capturing Vitebsk itself, some 75 km north-west of Smolensk. Marshal Timoshenko was then forced to send his battered and still-fragmented 19th Army into action. The army suffered terrible losses and many of the soldiers, newly

conscripted and untrained in combat, panicked. Even high-ranking officers lost their sense of perspective and reality. In one instance, Major General Aleksandr Gorbatov discovered a defensive position abandoned by all but three senior officers in a state of shock – including the regimental commander. Gorbatov later described the episode in his memoirs:

“How do you come to be in such a position?” I asked the CO. He replied with a helpless wave of his hand: ‘I fully appreciate the gravity of what has occurred here but there was nothing I could do; so we decided to stay and die here, rather than retreat without an order.’ He wore two Orders of the Red Banner, but he had only recently been called up from the Reserve after spending many years out of the army. I said to him that though he was perfectly capable of dying without leaving his post, what possible use was this to anyone? It embarrassed me to look at his pitiful face.”

Soviets struck back

Guderian's forces took advantage of the confusion to move forward rapidly from the south. On 13th July, ►

Stalin's air force was the world's largest

Size wasn't everything. Stalin was forced to admit this after his air force was severely depleted in the early months of the war.

The Soviets knew that air forces would play a crucial role in any future war. The *Bolshevik Glavvozduhflot* (Workers' and Peasants' Red Air Fleet) greatly expanded during the 1920s and 1930s as a result.

Developing the air force was part of Stalin's dream to transform the Soviet Union into an advanced industrial society that led in engineering and science. Stalin was soon celebrating a series of triumphs as Soviet aircraft performed one remarkable feat after another. In July 1937, for example, a Tupolev ANT-25 aircraft covered the distance between Moscow and San Jacinto, California, in 62 hours and 17 minutes. At the same time, aircraft production soared, and by 1938 Stalin had the world's largest fleet of military aircraft.

But the focus on breaking records and spectacular displays took its toll. For when German forces attacked the Soviet Union on 22nd June 1941, the Soviet Air Force

proved little use. In the first week alone, the Luftwaffe shot down 4,000 Soviet aircraft. The outbreak of war provided a hard lesson, and Stalin revived both production and development. By the end of the war, the USSR had produced 158,220 aircraft, the second highest number among the combatants after the US. As the war progressed, the technical capability of the aircraft was almost on a par with the machines of the Axis powers, especially in low-altitude combat.

Soviet engineers learned the hard way to build aircraft that could take on the German Luftwaffe as the war progressed.



I don't know how long our nerves can stand it ... I believe the quantity of our tremendous sacrifices is already enough. ■ A German soldier in his diary.

Fierce fighting broke out between the Germans and the Red Army in the countryside along the Dnieper River, which runs through the cities of Kiev (Kyiv) and Smolensk.

his advance unit, the 29th Motorised Division, stood just 18 km outside Smolensk. Two days later, with the help of a tank division, the soldiers took possession of the city – except for the outskirts. To the north, the advance slowed as heavy rain made the swampy terrain even more difficult to negotiate. However, the Germans advanced more or less on schedule and on 18th July, just 16 km separated the two German panzer groups.

The pincer manoeuvre was almost complete and soon Smolensk would be surrounded – or so the Germans assumed as they began to anticipate another victory. But the Germans rejoiced too soon. When Stalin heard that

German troops had moved into Smolensk, he ordered a full-scale response. The experienced Lieutenant General Konstantin K Rokossovsky was tasked with gathering the fragments of several Red Army units to block the advance. Rokossovsky quickly marshalled a force and skilfully managed to exploit the gap between the two German forces to rescue thousands of Soviet soldiers from the still-open pocket around Smolensk. The rescue immediately gave the Red Army the strength to launch a counter-attack:

“Then we began going over to the offence by delivering blows against the Germans, first in one



sector and then in another, frequently scoring appreciable tactical successes, which helped strengthen discipline among the troops and strengthened the confidence of the officers and men, who saw that they could actually beat the enemy, which meant a lot at that time,” Rokossovsky later wrote.

“Our activity apparently also puzzled the enemy command, which encountered resistance where it was not expected; they saw that our troops not only fought back but also attacked (even if not always successfully). This tended to create an exaggerated idea of our forces in the sector, and the enemy failed to take advantage of his great superiority.”

The fighting soon took its toll on Rokossovsky’s forces. In the days from 18th to 21st July alone, his tank division lost 140 of its total of 170 tanks. But the encounter with the massed Soviet troops also wore down the Germans, who were forced to devote their energies both to fighting Rokossovsky’s small force and holding back the forces now almost encircled in Smolensk. With so much to do, the otherwise unstoppable German panzer divisions lost momentum and clout for the first time.

Things worsened further for the invaders when on 21st July the Red Army sent further reinforcements to the area in the form of the 24th, 28th, 29th and 30th Armies. Hard pressed, the German tanks were forced to retreat momentarily. Only on 27th July – 12 days after the Germans had rolled into town, and well behind schedule – were the army’s forces able to close the pocket around Smolensk and capture 300,000 Soviet soldiers.

German army lacked everything

The Germans, however, still faced their biggest surprise yet. By 19th July, the army’s forces had occupied the hills outside the town of Yelnya, 82 km south-east of Smolensk, in another important step on the road to Moscow. But the panzer groups were stuck, lacking both fuel and ammunition. The German economy had not yet converted to war production, and this decision – a deliberate choice by the Nazis – was now being felt at the front.

In 1941, with the hunger and unemployment of the 1930s still fresh in the minds of German civilians, Hitler ensured the production of food and consumer goods was given equal priority to the manufacture of weapons and equipment for the soldiers. Since the Nazis believed that a woman’s place was in the home, women had not been permitted to take the place of those men who’d left the factories to go to war.

The consequences of that decision now played out at the end of July, when all panzer units on the Eastern Front found themselves short of essential equipment. Panzergruppe 1’s quartermaster – the officer in charge of feeding and equipping the unit –



The Tokarev TT-33 pistol was carried by Soviet officers.

Eight cartridges were loaded into the magazine. The gun was renowned for its immense power and precision.

described his disappointment when one of the unit’s officers returned empty-handed from headquarters:

“With his return it was hoped that news would be brought of the successful assignment of replacement motors, caterpillar tracks and ten-gear gearboxes. This was not the case. The fact that many panzers are in the workshops as a result of shortages of spare parts and cannot be returned to service is extremely regrettable and greatly reduces the number of combat-ready tanks. Under these circumstances roughly 50 percent of the panzers cannot be repaired.”

On the opposite side of the battlefield, Soviet troops weren’t hampered by such problems. For Stalin, the needs of the Red Army came first, and unlike the Nazis, the Communists had no qualms about including women in the workforce. In terms of manpower, Stalin could draw on the Soviet state’s almost inexhaustible reserves, so while the Germans’ vehicles stood idle, the Soviets weren’t just able to begin attacking the Germans’ flanks, but could also mobilise a whole new army unit. The unit, called the Reserve Front, was commanded by General Georgy Zhukov, and two of its armies – the 24th and the 43rd, the latter still in the process of being formed – were tasked in August with helping Timoshenko complete an audacious plan. Together they were to drive the Germans out of Yelnya near Smolensk, continue across the Desna River and then capture the town and railway junction of Roslavl.

Zhukov drove back invaders

The Red Army’s resistance caught Halder by surprise. The army chief of staff, less than two months after confidently proclaiming the war could be won in a matter of weeks, now started to lose faith in Operation Barbarossa. He summed up the situation on the Eastern Front on 11th August:

“The whole situation makes it increasingly plain that we have underestimated the Russian colossus ... At the outset of war, we reckoned with about 200 enemy divisions. Now we have already►

FACTS

The Red Army’s casualties were enormous during the Battle of Smolensk.

186,000

soldiers lost their lives.

In addition, the number of tanks and guns destroyed was more than

6,000.

The medal "For the Defence of Kiev" was given to over 100,000 of those who took part in the battle.



The medal was made to emphasise that Kiev had been dubbed a Hero City – an honorary Soviet title that was given to only 12 cities during World War II.

counted 360. These divisions indeed are not armed and equipped according to our standards, and their tactical leadership is often poor. But they are there, and if we smash a dozen of them, the Russians simply put up another dozen. The time factor favours them, as they are near their own resources, while we are moving further and further away from ours. And so our troops, sprawled over an immense front line, without any depth, are subjected to the incessant attacks of the enemy."

On 30th August, Red Army troops demonstrated their strength to the full. Zhukov launched his final advance with salvos fired from 800 guns, mortars and rockets. Over the following days, fighting swung back and forth. On several occasions, exhausting hand-to-hand combat ensued, sapping the German forces and their thin supply lines further.

"We have hard times and heavy losses. We have been at the same place for five weeks and are constantly hit hard by Russian artillery. I don't know how long our nerves can stand it ... I believe the quantity of our tremendous sacrifices is already enough. It is constantly promised that we will soon be home, but always to no avail," a German soldier wrote in his diary on 2nd September.

On the same day, Fedor von Bock, commander of the German army group *Hærgruppe Mitte* (Army Group Centre), confided his emerging anxiety to a diary entry:

"Today the enemy attacked the extreme southern wing of 4th Army ... If he keeps at it, we could end up in a fine mess."

Before the day was out, Bock had made his decision. The Germans could no longer hold Yelnya: *"The*

divisions deployed there are being bled white as time passes. After several conversations with Kluge, I decided to order the salient abandoned," he wrote.

At this point, the battle had cost Zhukov 31,853 men – or a third of his total attacking force. But the result was remarkable. For the first time, the Red Army had forced the German army to give up territory it had already captured. German Franz Frisch, fighting at Yelnya, later recounted the chaotic days of early September:

"I remember well the retreat from the Yelnya line. We had nearly exhausted our supplies of artillery ammunition, and did not provide the proper counter-battery support of infantry. As such our battery received a constant amount of Soviet artillery fire, and casualties.

"I remember we did not receive a re-supply of shells until days later when the front settled. It was pitch dark and we tried to make it back to the main front line. Every truck, every tractor with its gun, every soldier was on his own. But nobody knew where the battery commander was, and I guess he did not know where his guns were. [The retreat proceeded] without organisation, without communication and without command."

The Nazis in Berlin immediately tried to play down the defeat, but soldiers like Frisch knew better:

The Red Army
deployed 600,000
troops to defend
Smolensk. Almost
a third was killed.



Stalin's flying tank

The Ilyushin Il-2 ground-attack aircraft was highly manoeuvrable and one of the Soviet Air Force's most important planes during WWII. A total of 36,183 were built, making it the most-produced combat plane in history.

"Our Red Army now needs Il-2 aircraft like the air it breathes, like the bread it eats," Stalin said of the fighter, nicknamed the *Shturmovik* – Storm Bird.

The nickname refers to the fact that the aircraft supported ground troops by firing on enemy trucks, tanks and armoured

vehicles. The Il-2 first took to the skies a few days after the invasion in June 1941. Its pilots had little experience flying the new aircraft and losses were therefore high.

Soon, however, the aircraft proved its worth. Particularly effective was the circle of death, a tactic that involved a group of Il-2s swarming

around the target, breaking away one by one and diving towards the ground in an attack until the target was destroyed or the aircraft ran out of ammunition. During attacks, the aircraft could dive as low as 20 metres above the ground. The aircraft's role in ground battles earned it the nickname the flying tank.

ARMOUR PLATING:

Thick armour protected the aircraft's engine, cockpit and fuel tanks. The steel could withstand attacks from both machine guns and 20-mm cannons.

TAIL GUNNER:

The first Il-2s were only equipped with a single seat. Early combat, however, revealed the aircraft to be vulnerable to rear attack, so later planes were fitted with an extra seat in their tail sections. From here, a gunner could defend against enemies from behind.

WINGS AND TAIL:

To save steel – an essential commodity – and to lighten the aircraft's weight, the wings and tail were built of wood.

ENGINE: A 12-cylinder Mikulin AM-38 delivered 1,700 hp and was designed to operate stably at low altitude.

ARMAMENT: The aircraft carried six 100-kg bombs in and under the wings. Its weaponry also included eight rockets, two cannons and three machine guns.

*"Officially it was called a 'planned withdrawal', and a 'correction of the front lines' ... But to me it was so much bulls***. The Russians were kicking us badly and we had to regroup.*

"The next day – or maybe a few days later – we heard on the radio, in the 'news from the front' (Wehrmachtsbericht) about the 'successful front correction' in our Yelnya defensive line, which was east of Smolensk, and the enormous losses we had inflicted on the enemy. But no single word was heard about a retreat, about the hopelessness of the situation, about the mental and emotional stagnation and numbness of the German soldiers. In short, it was again a 'victory'. But we on the front line were running back like rabbits in front of the fox. This metamorphosis of the truth from

*'all s***' to 'it was a victory' baffled me, and those of my comrades who dared to think."*

Soldiers marched barefoot

The loss of Yelnya near Smolensk was a setback in the advance towards Moscow. But several days earlier – on 21st August – Hitler had already decided to postpone the attack on the Soviet capital and instead send his forces on an aggressive offensive against the Ukrainian city of Kiev (now Kyiv). The area's rich farmland and raw materials held a special place in Hitler's plans for future possessions in the east.

"It is not tolerable that the life of the peoples of the continent should depend upon England. The Ukraine, and then the Volga basin, will one day be the granaries of Europe ... If one day Sweden ►

Troop transports carrying equipment and men to the Red Army came under intense attack from the Germans. In many places, train carriages were left abandoned in enemy territory.



declines to supply any more iron, that's alright. We'll get it from Russia," Hitler told his confidantes.

Initially, however, Kiev's capture was designed to give the Germans access to Ukraine's raw materials and local factories near the industrial city so they could continue the war. Only after the capture of Kiev would Army Group Centre continue towards Moscow, while Army Group South advanced on the rich oil fields of the Caucasus.

As the defeated German forces retreated from Yelnya, Heinz Guderian's tank forces from Army Group Centre and Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt's forces from Army Group South headed for Kiev. Guderian was to advance from the north-east, while von Rundstedt advanced across the Dnieper from the south. On 12th September, Panzergruppe 1 crossed the Dnieper, but the advance ran into trouble. Autumn arrived early in 1941 and the rainfall was the worst since 1874, as noted by a soldier in the 2nd SS Panzer Division Das Reich, part of Guderian's force:

"On roads that have been washed away, in pouring rain, carrying all our weapons and equipment, we fight our way against enemy resistance. We are at the end of our strength. We have been marching for days and with only poor rations. The supply trucks are stuck fast in the mud 30 or more kilometres away. Many of the comrades have only socks to cover their feet. Their boots have fallen to pieces. Others go barefoot and their feet are torn as a result of the marches ... Soaked to the skin we dig in and our slit trenches fill quickly with water. The rain continues to pour down ... We are lying in water and yet we are thirsty."

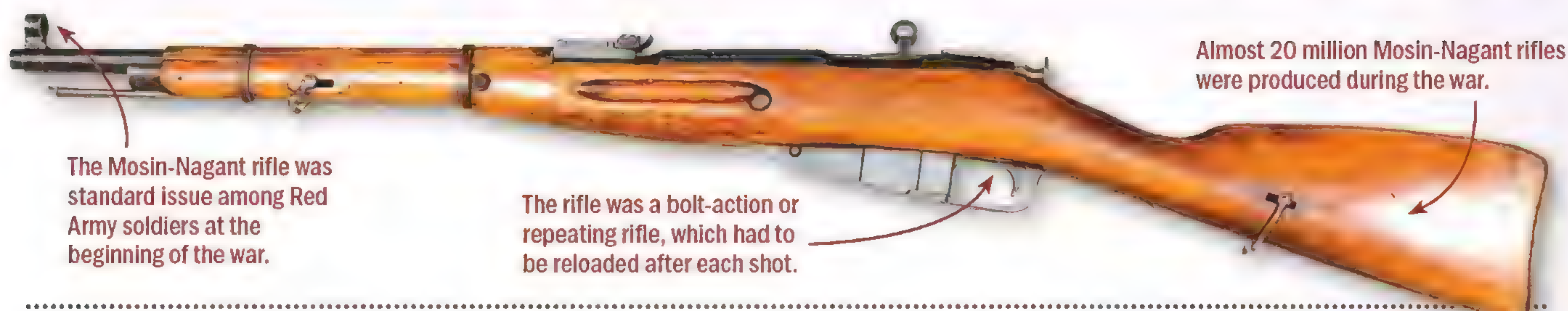
Later that day, the soldier opened his diary again to add another disillusioned entry:

"We come under fire ... everywhere there are calls for stretcher-bearers ... Our Company suffered 14 killed and 17 wounded ... our wounded comrade Gail died on the way back. His death depresses us all very much as only two days ago he received a telegram telling him he was now the father of a healthy boy."

Stalin's air forces spread fear

The threat came not only from the ground. Operation Barbarossa began triumphantly for the Luftwaffe, disposing of 4,000 Soviet aircraft within a week – most of them still on the runway. But although the Germans still held air supremacy, Soviet forces were managing to send an increasingly alarming number of planes into the air. On 26th August, Halder noted in his diary that Soviet air power *"in the area under observation"* amounted to as many as 3,700 aircraft. By comparison, the Luftwaffe had only 2,995 planes.

Worse still, the Germans weren't producing aircraft at anywhere near the same rate as the Soviets, whose war industry now steamed ahead at full speed. New



Soviet planes were also well suited to combating German tank forces, and especially the Il-2, popularly known as the *Shturmovik* – Storm Bird. The aircraft was designed to fly low to attack tanks and vehicles on the ground and, thanks to its low altitude, could attack before it was detected. Even if spotted, the *Shturmovik* could take up the fight from its position close to the ground. The machine's flying qualities made it popular.

"I cannot say that the Il-2 was as uncomplicated as a block of wood, but it was resilient on landing. Even if your approach was short, it would squat down and land OK. The main thing was that it was reliable and hardy. Precisely the qualities required of an assault aircraft," Ivan Konovalov, one of the plane's many pilots, recalled later.

The threat of the Soviet air force was felt everywhere. German forces south of Kiev at Dnipropetrovsk were establishing a bridgehead to allow them to cross the Dnieper and approach Kiev from the south when they came under heavy attack from the air. On 31st August alone, they were hit by as many as 12 attacks by a total of 66 aircraft. The repeated attacks helped destroy the bridge, which the Germans had to rebuild 15 times in the space of just a few days – three times due to air strikes.

At night, attacks both at Dnipropetrovsk and at other positions around Kiev proved extremely stressful for the hard-pressed Germans. Erich Kern, an Austrian national, later described how the sound of Russian aircraft – often referred to as *"sewing machines"* because of the sound of their engines – constantly disturbed German soldiers:

"Every few minutes during the night, bombs were tipped, as [if] from a giant shovel on our resting columns, its effect in [the] course of time was very heavy on our nerves."

On 29th August and 4th September, Soviet air forces flew 4,000 and 2,860 sorties respectively against Guderian's forces advancing through the mud towards Kiev. But Luftwaffe attacks and anti-aircraft fire on the ground wore down Stalin's air force, and by 1st September, the Soviet Southwestern Front army group had only 163 aircraft left, despite the flow of reinforcements from outside.

In Moscow it was clear that Kiev was being surrounded, but Stalin refused to order a withdrawal

– not even when German tank forces supported by the Luftwaffe broke out from the Dnipropetrovsk bridgehead on 12th September. On this occasion, the Luftwaffe dropped as many as 600 tonnes of bombs, severely damaging the railway network.

Kiev stood firm

On 15th September, German forces reached Kiev. A tank corps took 31,000 prisoners of war as other Soviet soldiers faced a nervous retreat east. In a letter on 19th September, a Soviet major reported that he'd had no sleep for four nights:

"All around, wherever you look there are German tanks, sub-machine guns or machine gun nests. Our unit has already been defending on all sides for four days within this circle of fire. At night the surrounding ring is clear to see, illuminated by fire that lights up the horizon, which here and there gives the sky a wondrous pink hue."

On the same day, German forces closed in around Kiev. But the Soviet soldiers fought on. Stalin's generals had advised him to abandon Kiev, but he stood firm; the city must be held to the last – an order that officers and conscripts followed to the letter.

"The Russians' behaviour in action is simply incomprehensible. They are incredibly stubborn, ►

The Ukrainian city of Kiev was badly hit by the fighting. Here, the city's central square was left almost in ruins after the battle.



Trenches became necessary in front of the cities of Smolensk and Kiev, where for the first time the Germans no longer stormed forward but were also forced to entrench and defend themselves.



and refuse to budge even under the most powerful gunfire,” read a letter found on the body of a German soldier killed in September. Another German was equally astonished by the resistance in Kiev:

“Whether they come in with tanks or whether the infantry comes in without support, whether their Cossacks charge in on horses or whether they come rolling forward in motor lorries, the end is always the same. They are driven back with such losses that one wonders how they can find the courage and the men to keep coming on ... Do they have any feeling of

fear? It seems not for they attack regularly and charge forward without hesitation. Some of my comrades think that the Bolsheviks must be either drugged or drunk to keep coming in like that ... The [Soviet] dead stretched for miles ... We lost men too, for it must not be believed that this was an easy victory. But their dead, particularly where there had been a fierce battle, formed a carpet.”

Boris Zamanski, a Jewish laboratory assistant working in a Red Army mobile chemical laboratory, was among the Soviets who resisted fiercely. First, he made sure none of his precious lab equipment could fall into enemy hands:

“Soon our entire army, together with the commander-in-chief, Colonel-General M P Kirponos, was trapped in Kiev. I set fire to my mobile laboratory. The other vehicles with their stock of gas masks and other equipment I had to leave behind. Many thought the situation hopeless and went into captivity.”

Jewish lab technician hid on an island

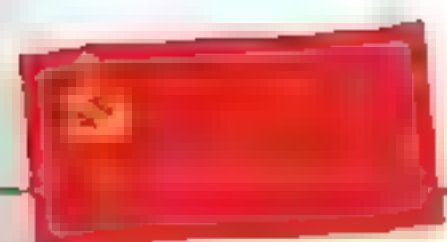
Zamanski attempted to flee with a group of soldiers:

“A group of several dozen soldiers, who decided not to surrender, was surrounded by the Germans. We tried to escape, but the Germans pursued us through the marshy terrain to a small island in the Udal River near Kiev. The landscape on the island was completely barren, there was nowhere to find shelter or hide. Only small tufted bushes grew there, so the Germans had a good view. It all happened during the day.

“The Germans ordered a local citizen to come down to the water and translate for them. ‘If you want to live, you must surrender. Otherwise you will be killed,’ he shouted. We told him to shove it, at which point mortar fire rained down upon the island. When it stopped, the people on the beach offered again for us to save ourselves by surrendering as prisoners of war. The island was subjected to both shelling and machine-gun fire. Many of those who tried to hide were killed or wounded. I lay among the bodies of my comrades and understood that I had no chance of escaping alive.

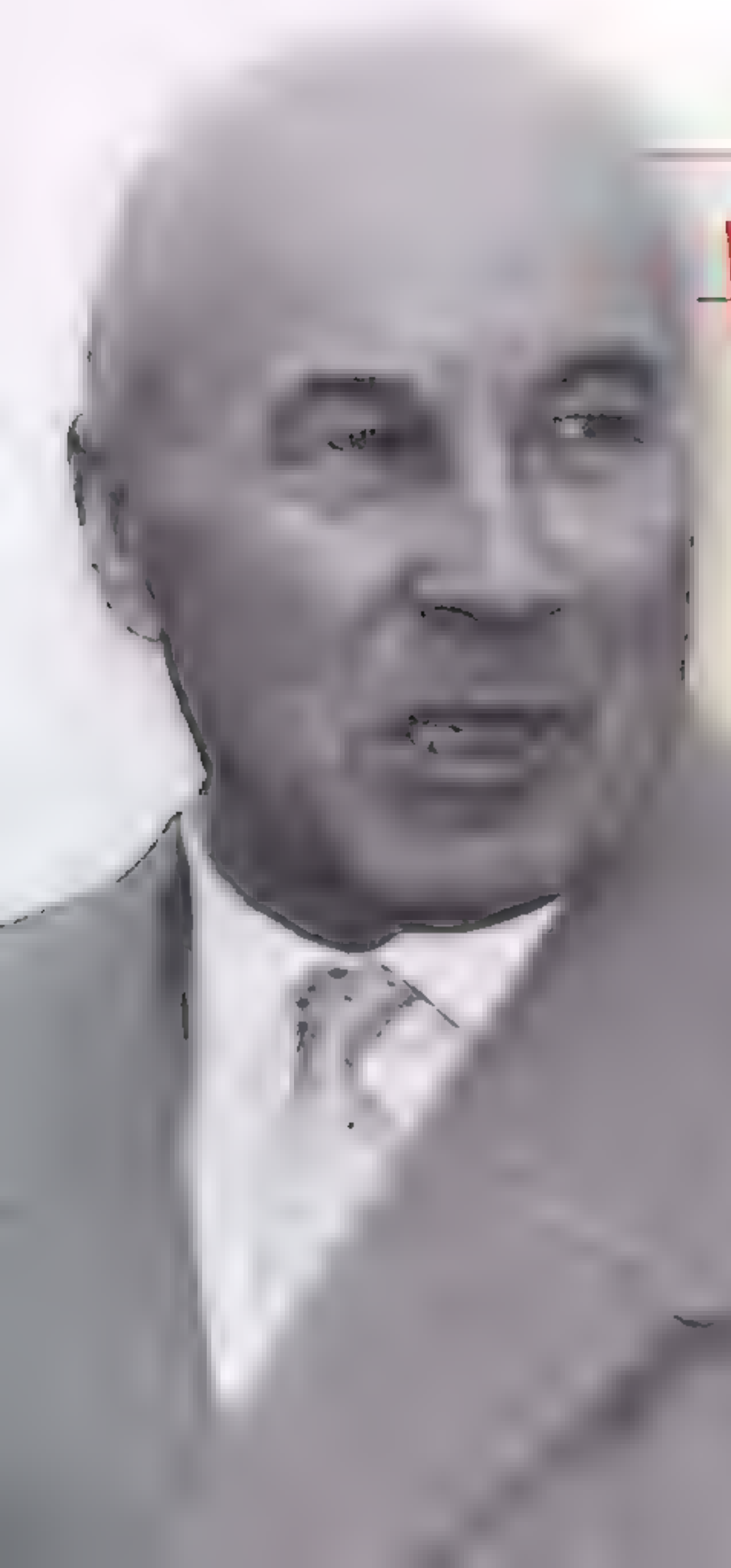
“One of our people, who was still alive, got up. ‘Give us a boat,’ he shouted towards the beach. The fire stopped, and soon boats rowed by locals began to approach the island. Those who decided to surrender went down to the boats. I had already heard that the Germans were killing Jews, but it was hard for me to believe the rumours. It sounded so horrible and wild and unbelievable to me. But then I remembered that I had seen a sign earlier that said ‘Kill the Jewish commissars.’ That settled it. I did not go down to the boats.

“The Germans again shelled the island with mortars. It became dark. We were only four



PAVEL FEDOROVICH ZHIGAREV (1900-1962)

Zhigarev joined the air force in the 1920s, when the force was developing rapidly. There he rose through the ranks until his big break came in 1941, when Stalin carried out a series of purges. The assassinations paved the way for Zhigarev, who then became commander-in-chief of the Soviet air forces. As air marshal during Operation Barbarossa, Zhigarev helped transform the ill-prepared Soviet Air Force into a war-ready force.



Do they have any feeling of fear? It certainly seems not for they attack regularly and charge forward without hesitation. ■ A German soldier describes the Soviet enemy.



people left on the island and we awaited the sad end and prepared to die.

"At night a boat arrived on the island. A local Ukrainian must have been out to see if there was anything he could loot from the dead. He had no suspicion that there were still living soldiers on the island. We knocked him unconscious, tied him up and used his boat to get to the riverbank. Here we carefully disembarked and split into two groups. I escaped with a friend from the assault brigade. We found our army near Kharkov [now Kharkiv]."

Few were that lucky. When Kiev finally surrendered on 26th September, hundreds of thousands were forced into German captivity and the prisoners faced a grim fate. War prisoner Nikolai Obryn'ba recalled:

"The first transit camp was near the town of Belyi. We were kept there for ten days. We were not fed or given water, and we were exposed to the elements ... Here for the first time, I saw young, healthy men dying of starvation ... Before each new march, guards with sticks lined up on both sides of the column and the command 'All run!' would be given. The mob ran and hard blows would rain upon us. This kind of beating would last for one or two kilometres before the word 'Stop!' was

announced ... The exercise was repeated several times, so only the fittest would survive and march on. But many remained behind and solitary shots would ring out, as the Germans finished them off."

Lieutenant General Friedrich Freiherr von Broich involuntarily testified about the treatment of Soviet prisoners of war when he was a prisoner at Trent Park Manor in north London from 1943. The section of British intelligence tasked with obtaining information from PoWs was MI19, and it eavesdropped on prisoners using hidden microphones in their cells to intercept military secrets. Von Broich told the British the truth, completely unaware he was doing so:

"We marched down the road and a column of about 6,000 tottering figures went past, completely emaciated, helping each other along. Every 100 or 200 metres two or three of them collapsed. Soldiers of ours on bicycles rode alongside with pistols; everyone who collapsed was shot and thrown into the ditch. That happened every 100 metres."

Compared to the Soviet prisoners of war, Friedrich Freiherr von Broich got off lightly. He was able to return unharmed to Germany in 1947. And in the battle for Kiev, too, the Germans were relatively lucky, even though the fighting was the fiercest yet on the Eastern Front. The battle raged through August ►

Scouts on horseback rode ahead of the German advance. Nearly a million horses were involved in the German invasion.

Machinery from the evacuated parts of the Soviet Union often arrived in a rush. This further complicated the task of rebuilding factories in the east.

and September, and some 61,000 Germans were killed, wounded or missing.

The Soviet Union, on the other hand, suffered huge losses. The stubborn defence of Kiev decimated the Red Army by at least 600,000 troops – an absolutely staggering figure. Soviets had been killed, captured or reported missing. To this must be added some 84,000 sick and wounded, and materiel losses of 400 tanks, 342 aircraft and 30,000 guns and mortars. But the sacrifices of Soviet soldiers weren't in vain. Their

stubborn resistance at Smolensk and Kiev delayed the Germans so much that the panzer forces only reached Moscow just before the onset of winter – a delay that would prove fatal.

Hundreds of factories relocated

At the same time, the delay made it possible to achieve another important objective, which would prove ultimately decisive for the war's outcome. That objective was the evacuation of essential Soviet industry from the areas threatened by the German invaders. The successful withdrawal of machinery and thousands of workers deprived



Hitler of one of his most important war targets and was a remarkable achievement in itself. As much as 40 percent of the Soviet population and most of the Soviet manufacturing industry were situated in the western part of the country near the German border at the outbreak of war. Here, according to Soviet inventories, there were as many as 31,850 industrial enterprises, 749 machine factories, 1,135 mines, over 3,000 oil wells, 61 power stations and hundreds of organisations producing textiles, food and other consumer goods.

Soviet leaders realised they needed to secure industry for the sake of waging future warfare but were otherwise at a loss as to how the task should be

achieved. Consequently, the state established an evacuation council as early as 24th June – two days after the invasion – with the aim of “directing the evacuation of the population, institutions, military and other transports, factory equipment and other valuables” eastwards – away from the front.

Nikolai Dubrovin, Deputy Commissar of Railways in the People’s Commissariat of Transportation, remembered the great confusion of the early days:

“We didn’t have concrete, well-developed evacuation plans in case of an unfavourable course of events ... On orders from higher up we searched the archives and the libraries ▶



Many remained behind and solitary shots would ring out, as the Germans finished them off. ■ Prisoner of war Nikolai Obryn'ba.

of Moscow, including the Lenin State Library, to find even a scrap of information on evacuations during World War I, but we found almost nothing ... We acquired experience during the course of the war."

Workers toiled until the last minute

The task was huge. Not only did the factories and other businesses have to be packed up and moved, but they would also need to accommodate existing enterprises and buildings in the new area to the east. Workers would also require shelter, electricity, food and other necessities – all a huge challenge for the new host towns and cities, whose populations would triple overnight with the arrival of the new residents.

Things were further complicated by the need to continue producing arms and ammunition until the last possible minute due to shortages at the front. Dubrovin recalled: *"As a result, it was necessary to prepare industrial equipment for dismantling and evacuation while at the same time under artillery shelling and enemy bombardment."*

During July, an outline for an evacuation programme was put in place. The plans included those factories immediately behind the front and

involved around two million people. As the German army advanced, however, the plan proved inadequate. A few million more Soviet citizens would now require moving in addition to those already covered.

Nikolai S Patolichev, first secretary of the Communist Party's regional committee in the city of Chelyabinsk, which lay close to the Ural Mountains, described the arrival of the first train carriages to the area that would now house the Soviet war industry:

"Sometimes refugees had to travel in roofless wagons or in flat cars. They were lucky if they had tarpaulin to cover themselves against rain or snow. They travelled sitting on top of or in the spaces between machine-tools and industrial materials, suitcases and bundles containing their meagre possessions. Those were just a few essential things they had been able to pick up in haste."

"They were running for their lives from the Nazi barbarians and rescuing property was a luxury they could not afford. When conditions were more favourable, two or three covered coaches would be set aside for women with children. Often 80 to 100 refugees crowded into a coach that would normally take 36 passengers. Nobody

German propaganda translated into Russian became, after the conquest of Kiev and Smolensk, the source of the local population's news about the war.



complained. They were all in the same boat, all made homeless by the Nazi invaders."

Kiev was particularly busy, with German troops fighting hard to capture the city. A total of 450 transports departed to the east. As many as 197 major factories and 350,000 inhabitants were evacuated. L I Pogrebnoi, who in 1941 served as a representative on the Council for Evacuation, described the challenge of moving entire factories in his memoirs:

"Conditions were exceptionally difficult. Kiev was under bombardment from morning until night. Evacuation was in a terrible hurry. However, the workers, despite such strain, showed unparalleled heroism and managed to ship out of Kiev all the main equipment and raw materials."

Effort saved industry

The town of Zaporozhe (now Zaporizhzhia) presented a particular challenge. In the early 1900s, the town was a sleepy little hamlet. However, during the great wave of industrialisation of the 1920s and 1930s, it grew rapidly. A large new hydroelectric power station – the most powerful in Europe – sprang up outside the town. At the same time, the authorities built large steel and aluminium works, and a brand-new, modern district. In the 1930s, a steel rolling mill with an annual capacity of 600,000 tonnes also opened.

Moving the metal companies from Zaporozhe to the Urals required up to 8,000 railway wagons, each reinforced to cope with the enormous weight of the factory equipment. The work was done at breakneck speed and under constant enemy surveillance from the opposite bank of the Dnieper, recalled A G Sheremet'ev, who oversaw the evacuation.

"The enemy saw that the equipment from Zaporozhe's factories was being shipped out, and they bombed and shelled the territory of the factories daily with artillery and mortar fire. Every day, people were wounded and killed. But people worked and they pushed on." On some days, 800-900 wagons were loaded with equipment and raw materials.

In other areas, too, things developed rapidly. For example, more than 500 factories and 210,000 workers were evacuated from the Moscow area in October and November alone. Machinery, tools and building parts arrived at remote sites in disarray and not always on time. The harsh winter weather and permafrost in the northern regions also hampered the work rebuilding factories. But workers stubbornly continued to toil under the glow of electric lights hung from trees on the site, warming their frozen fingers on open fires.

"The story of how whole industries and millions of people had been moved to the east, of how industries were set up in a minimum of time, in appallingly difficult conditions, and of how these industries managed to increase production to an enormous extent during 1942, was, above all, a

THE BATTLE FOR KIEV:



The Sydney Morning Herald

Tuesday 23rd September 1941

Russia is in graver plight

LONDON, 22nd September: With the fall of ancient Kiev, Russia's third largest city and a gateway to the grainfields, mines and heavy industries of the Ukraine, admitted in last night's Soviet communique, Russia's military position has become more serious than at any time since the war began.

Commentators emphasise the dangers, but seek a measure of consolation from the fact that it is still not clear what proportion of Marshal Budenny's army fell with the city or was trapped eastward within the German encircling forces.

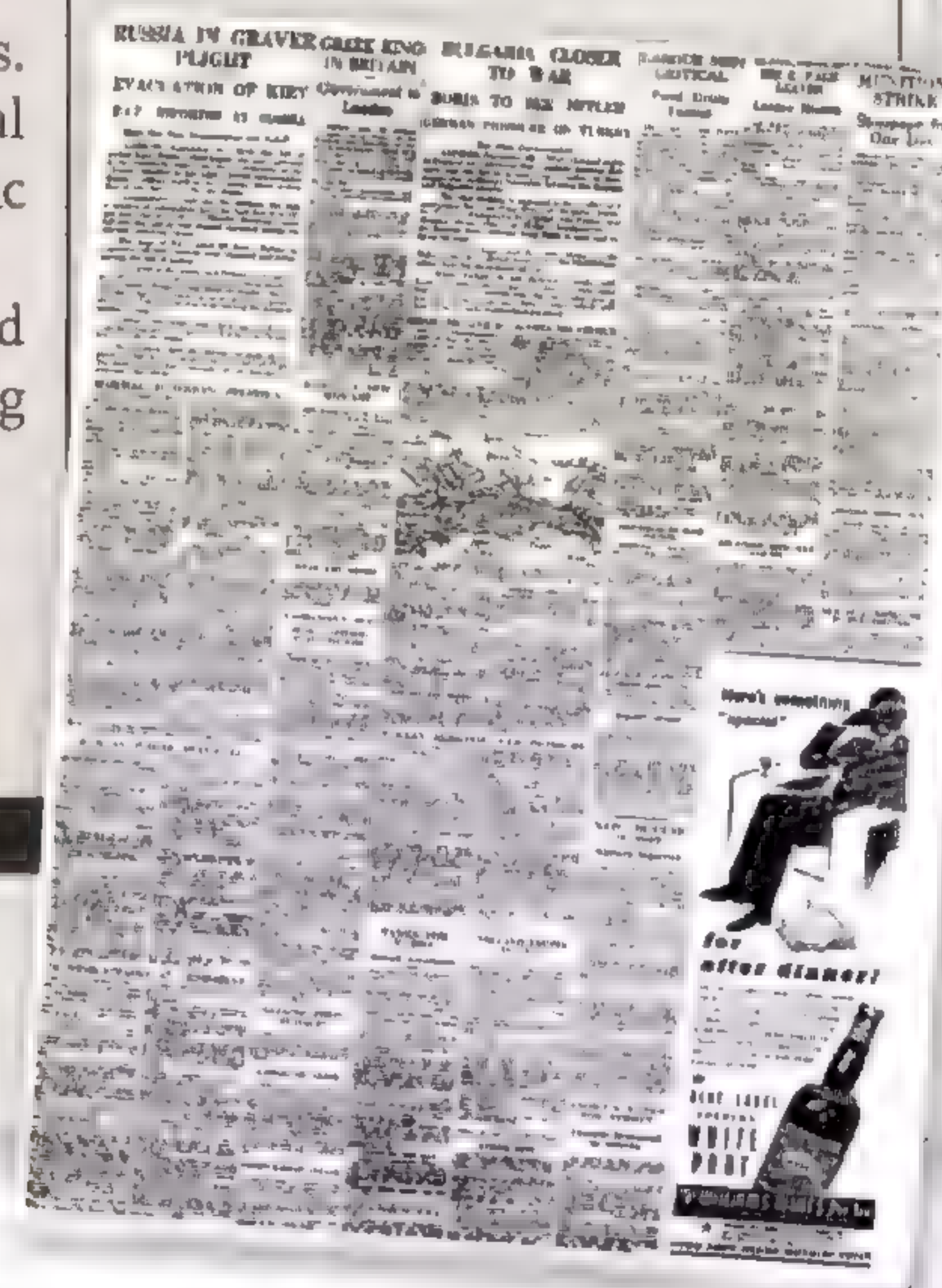
The siege of Kiev lasted 46 days. Before its evacuation all vital supplies were removed and public services put out of action.

Leningrad in the north, and Odessa in the south, are holding

out, and counter-attacks are being made by the Russians. Reports from Moscow suggest that the German High Command is now devoting greater attention to Odessa and also is increasing the pressure against Leningrad.

A report from Rome today says that the RAF yesterday took part in a great air battle over Odessa, and had very few losses. The Germans claim the capture of most of the island of Osel, at the entrance to the Gulf of Riga, The destruction of the remainder of the garrison is imminent, they declare.

The news in the West painted a bleak picture of the situation in the Soviet Union in 1941.



story of incredible human endurance," wrote the English journalist Alexander Werth, who was in the Soviet Union during the move.

A total of 1,523 factories, including 1,360 related to the arms industry, were moved to safety beyond the Volga River and on to Siberia or Central Asia between July and November 1941. It was a remarkable effort – not least because the factories managed to return to their previous levels of productivity after just one year.

The evacuation was, according to Zhukov, on a par with "the greatest battles of World War II" – one that was won only because of the stubborn resistance of Soviet forces in and around Smolensk and Kiev. ■

“At Leningrad there were only 437 of us left”

By Jens Jørgen Nielsen

Aged just 17, Semen Chtipelman enlisted in the Red Army in 1940. The following year he stood at Leningrad and endured hunger, frost and death to help stop the German onslaught on the city. He was one of only a few from his unit to survive the fighting and see the war through to its bitter end.

Can you tell us a little about yourself? What were you doing before the war and how did you become part of the Red Army?

I come from a small Jewish shtetl (small town) in south-western Ukraine. I grew up in a poor Jewish family; my father was a shoemaker. For a few years just before the war, I went to a boarding school about 12 km from home.

I was only home on weekends. Then I worked in an ordinary factory until I was drafted into the Red Army in 1940. I was immediately sent to Estonia just before the referendum on Estonian incorporation into the Soviet Union that year. My first tasks were to secure Estonia against ‘provocations’. Inclusion into the Soviet Union was a controversial issue, and not all Estonians were happy with the outcome.

I was a cadet in the 72nd Light Artillery Regiment and

spent much of that time on exercise. I specialised as an observer. However, I also had other duties – including being put in charge of some of the regimental horses that pulled the guns. The horses were therefore important to us, but it was a lot of work to look after them. For example, I often spent a lot of time finding feed for them. Our training in the army was tough; it seemed like punishment for the Soviet Union’s not very impressive performance during the Winter War.

What was the reaction when you heard that Germany had attacked the Soviet Union?

We were prepared for it. Contrary to popular belief, our commanders and the Communist organisations in the army had prepared us for war with Germany. One of our majors said to us a few months before the war:

“Learn to hit the German tanks on sight, because you’re going to meet them soon.” And how right he was – contrary to the talk from our Soviet government about the unbreakable friendship between the Soviet Union and fascist Germany.

That’s not to say that we were well prepared, but we were not that surprised when the Germans attacked us. We had already been moved from Estonia to Lithuania – to the border with German-

SEMEN DAVIDOVICH CHTIPELMAN

(1922-2021) took part in the Red Army’s battles against Germany during the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. An artillery officer, Semen was involved in the defence of Leningrad, the fighting in the Caucasus and the liberation of Budapest in 1945. Semen Chtipelman died on 6th January 2021, shortly after this interview.





occupied Poland – in the spring of 1941. We thought, now it's serious.

Where did you first become part of the war and what was your role?

Many of my comrades had served in the Winter War against Finland, so they already had some experience. I didn't. But I served in Estonia, which was foreign to us, even though Estonia had just become a Soviet republic at that time.

We patrolled areas in Estonia, even though we were not at war with the country. I first became part of the war on 22nd June 1941, early in the morning. We were issued ammunition and then the war was on.

At the beginning of the war, the Soviets gave up an enormous amount of land and were pushed back on all fronts. Did you soldiers feel that you were losing the war and how did you feel during the constant retreats?

Yes, it was hard. The Germans were advancing fast, and our equipment was nowhere near their standard. We could see that when we occasionally got hold of some German military kit. Our artillery unit had 7,000 men on 22nd June 1941. About six months later, when we fought at Leningrad, 437 of us were left – the rest had died in action. But we never once thought that we might lose. We were brought up to believe that the Red Army was the mightiest of all. We fought for the Motherland, for our families and our country. We were sure we would win. I think it was that spirit that ultimately won us the war.

Our experiences around Leningrad were mainly marked by hunger, frost and death. We all suffered to varying degrees from scurvy and frostbite. Our daily ration at Leningrad was 300 grams of bread made from 40 percent flour, 20 percent wood bark and 40 percent animal feed.

We were tired and not particularly aggressive, but then neither were the Germans at that time. Winter seemed to get the better of them. Our ►

Semen and his surviving comrades celebrated peace on 9th May 1945 with a trip to a photo studio.



Semen Chtipelman

unit was outside Leningrad; we were constantly hungry during that time. One day I found three frozen raw potatoes the size of walnuts. I don't think I've ever tasted anything so sweet.

Our regiment was disbanded because of the heavy losses, and later in August 1942 I joined a new unit that was to operate in the Caucasus. It was the 92nd Artillery Corps. We trained for a while and then were sent to war against the German army. We fought every day until the end of the war.

Every day we were aware that the next day there would be some of us who would no longer be there. It was very hard. After some time in the war, I couldn't cry any more – all the tears had been cried out. Instead, it felt as if I had sand in my eyes.

When was the first time you really helped to slow the advance of the Germans? Can you tell us a bit about what suddenly proved successful and how you stopped the German advance, which had been unstoppable until then?

It was in 1942 that we stopped a German division in the North Caucasus. All the participants were awarded the Red Banner. To receive this order,

one had to be a member of the Communist Party. I became a member and was given a work assignment in the Communist youth organisation Komsomol. Receiving the order was a tremendous boost for us.

Can you put into words when you felt the war was beginning to turn?

In the Crimea and in the North Caucasus and Ukraine, in 1943, we began to experience the first victories. Not without great and painful losses, but we certainly saw that the Germans were not invincible. From the summer of 1944, we felt that victory was within our grasp. The Romanian regiments fighting on the side of the Germans were among the first to lay down their arms and surrender. We met fierce resistance in Hungary, and the fighting around Budapest was particularly bloody. Hungary was an important bastion for the Germans. But once the resistance in Budapest was overcome, it was quite easy the rest of the way to Czechoslovakia and Austria, where we heard on 9th May 1945 that the war was over.

I think many people would have given up and collapsed during four years of fighting. Can

Semen served in the Red Army artillery. As an observer, he had to pick out targets and make sure the shells hit.



My whole family, all my friends and neighbours were dead. The Jewish shtetl of my childhood was gone. I had no loved ones left. ■ Semen Chtipelman.

you tell us what drove you and kept you going for those long years?

The fight for the Motherland. My family, relatives and friends. I also knew as a Jew that it would be certain death for me if Germany won the war.

What was your experience in the cities and areas you recaptured, and how did civilians in the cities you liberated from Nazism react?

I was in the war from the beginning in June 1941 in Lithuania until Victory Day on 9th May 1945 – interrupted only by a few months in hospital after I was shot in the leg and wounded.

We encountered many different reactions from the civilian population in the places we were. In the Baltic countries there were quite divided opinions about the Red Army. We saw many who were against us, some who directly supported the Germans. They saw us as an occupying force. But there were also some with whom we could speak Russian and who were favourably disposed towards us.

In the Caucasus, Crimea and Ukraine, we were welcomed as heroes in most places. In many places we were fed, even though large parts of the population were poor. When we moved out of Soviet territory, things changed. In Romania, we saw in some places prosperous towns and countryside that had not been affected by the war at all. It was strange for us to experience this prosperity. We had not experienced such wealth in our own country – especially not in the countryside where I come from.

In Hungary we met with greater resistance. Some civilians fled from us and were hostile. Others came to us for help because the Romanians were persecuting them. We drank a lot of wine with some Hungarians. Here, too, we were surprised at how well off many of the peasants were; they lived in fine, beautiful houses and had good food.

The battles for Budapest were very hard and lasted several months. It was the last major battle I experienced. Some Hungarian units fought very fiercely. We once saw them, like deranged people, going around killing some of our wounded and fallen comrades with knives. But in January and early February, more and more Hungarians began to surrender. Soon after, the Germans surrendered and that was the end of it.

We quickly moved on to Czechoslovakia. We wanted to get there as quickly as the Americans. The Czechoslovaks welcomed us. So did the Austrians. The Austrians knew the war was over



Semen Chtipelman survived four years of brutal fighting on the Eastern Front. The war ended for him when his regiment reached Austria in May 1945.

when they saw us. That's why they rejoiced at the sight of the Red Army.

Can you tell us about the day the war ended?

On 9th May, we had just arrived in the Lower Austrian town of Gars am Kamp. We received the message that the war had ended there. We found a photo studio and took a lot of pictures. I got the negatives, and later I distributed the pictures to my fellow officers. We didn't go home right away. We stayed in the area.

How could life go on after the war?

I came back to a shattered country, as the Soviet Union was in 1945. My whole family, all my friends and neighbours were dead. The Jewish shtetl of my childhood was gone. I had no loved ones left. The only thing I had left was the army, and I continued my service there for some years.

There are very few survivors left after WWII. How would you describe the war to the rest of us?

It's horrific. I lost everything, my family and my friends. We only have this one life. So, I would like to say to the younger generations that whatever differences states and nations have with each other, war is the worst solution. ■



This chapter makes
uncomfortable
reading.

HOLOCAUST IN THE EAST

When it became completely dark and quiet ... I saw the ditch filling with thousands of killed. I looked at myself and got scared. The undershirt that was covering my body was all bloody.

Dina Mironovna Vasserman.

Soviet Union, autumn 1941



The brutal slaughter of Jews followed in the wake of the German invasion army. The Einsatzgruppen carried out the dirty work.

Holocaust in the East

Specially trained SS units – the Einsatzgruppen – followed on the heels of Hitler’s invasion forces. Ostensibly, their job was to keep order in the captured territories. The reality, however, was different. They were death squads, set up for the sole purpose of getting rid of the region’s Jews.

By Else Christensen

On 13th March 1941, General Wilhelm Keitel, head of the German Army’s High Command and Hitler’s closest military adviser, signed a document setting out the details of Operation Barbarossa, Nazi Germany’s forthcoming invasion of the Soviet Union. On the surface, it was just another order churned out by the Reich’s bureaucracy with characteristic thoroughness. But hidden among the dry technical details was a special provision. The order assigned SS commander Heinrich Himmler a number of duties of far-reaching significance.

What the special duties consisted of was suitably broad and vague: the SS was to protect the army’s rear troops and areas behind the front against hostile activity, partisans, terrorists and other enemies of the state.

It was only when the operation got underway a little more than two months later that it became clear what the wording meant. Heinrich Himmler’s task was to murder the Soviet Union’s Jews as quickly, efficiently and systematically as possible. With his

signature, Keitel gave the army’s blessing to one of the most brutal and bloody operations of the war.

Himmler set up a number of *Einsatzgruppen* – task forces. The groups were, in fact, death squads, and their task was to follow the German forces and, in their wake, kill the Soviet Jews. In doing so, they were to create a Jew-free area in the East, ready to be inhabited by German farmers and their families. The task would be carried out with uncanny zeal, and the experience would pave the way for the death camps and industrialised mass murder of millions of European Jews.

Locals did dirty work

The idea of specific death squads was not new. During the invasion of Poland, the Nazis sent specially trained units to murder Polish intellectuals and others they deemed might pose a particular threat to the German invaders. Himmler could therefore use this experience for the training programme that was to prepare soldiers for the special task.

At the end of May 1941, 120 SS soldiers designated to lead the death squads underwent a short training regime at the medieval castle of Pretzsch, a small town about 80 kilometres south-west of Berlin. The training was primarily ideological. Standartenführer Walter Blume recollected after the war how Reinhard Heydrich, head of the Reich Security Central Office and thus of the Einsatzgruppen, stated in a speech to the future unit leaders that “*eastern Jewry was the intellectual reservoir of Bolshevism and, therefore, in the Führer’s opinion, must be exterminated*”.

Under him, the leaders were given 3,000 men, divided into four groups, each responsible for one of four areas of the Soviet Union. The task forces were to advance after the army and were attached to one or more military units. Einsatzgruppe A operated in the Baltic States. Einsatzgruppe B was sent to Belarus and central Soviet Union. Einsatzgruppe C would operate in northern and central Ukraine, while Einsatzgruppe D would be responsible for southern Ukraine.

When German soldiers crossed the Soviet border on 22nd June 1941, the Einsatzgruppen followed right behind. From the outset, the SS soldiers encouraged locals to take part in the persecution of Jews, and in the western territories of the Soviet Union, few needed any encouragement to attack the Jewish inhabitants. Anti-Semitism and the killing and



The Nazis believed they were blameless. Instead, their propaganda claimed Jews were the cause of the war’s atrocities.

persecution of Jews had a long history in Eastern Europe and Russia, and many believed – and had believed for generations – that Jews were the root of all evil, not least the Russian occupation of the Baltic states and Stalin's starvation of Ukraine in the 1930s. They even – according to many – controlled the Communist Party and were in league with the NKVD, the Soviet security service. So, when Soviet forces were sent fleeing by the advancing Germans, the people of the Baltics and Ukraine took their revenge on the Jews. The fact that the Germans let the locals know that they would grant independence to Soviet states such as Ukraine when the war was over increased the willingness of the area's population to carry out the Nazis' extermination policy.

Just three days after the invasion, the mass killings began. Between 25th and 28th June, some 3,800 Jews were murdered in the city of Kaunas in Lithuania. Eyewitnesses reported that the perpetrators wore white armbands, the hallmark of Lithuanian nationalists. Wilhelm Gunsilius, a photographer and soldier in the army, witnessed the massacre:

"At the beginning of the Russian campaign on the morning of 22nd June 1941, I was transferred with my unit to Gumbinnen. We remained there until the following Tuesday, 24th June 1941. On that Tuesday I was ordered to transfer from Gumbinnen to Kovno, with an advance party. I arrived there with the head of an army unit on Wednesday morning."

Gunsilius was tasked with finding a location for his platoon, and through his work he had access to aerial photos showing suitable captured houses in which to board the German soldiers. He then continued on foot into the city.

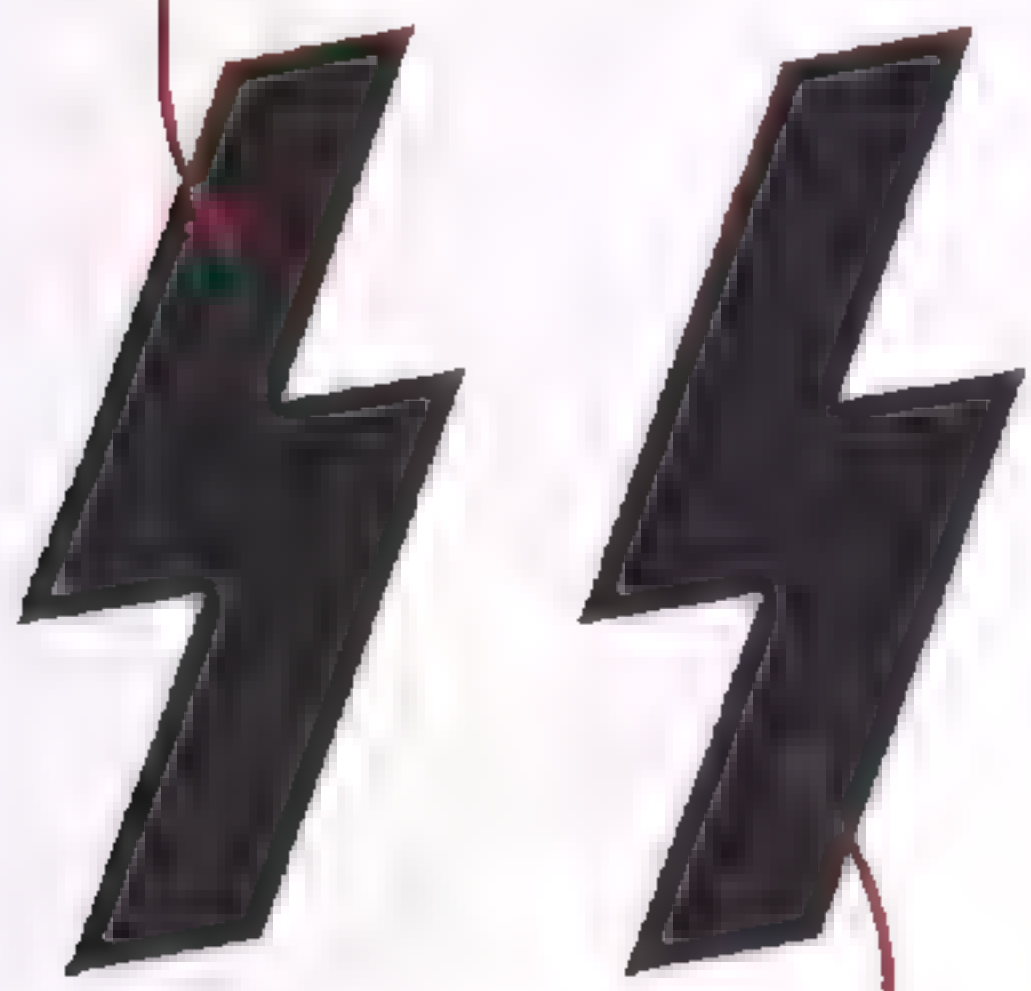
"There were no more significant clashes in the city. Close to my quarters I noticed a crowd of people in the forecourt of a petrol station, which was surrounded by a wall on three sides. The way to the road was completely blocked by a wall of people."

"In the left corner of the yard there was a group of men aged between 30 and 50. There must have been 40 to 50 of them. They were herded together and kept under guard by some civilians. The civilians were armed with rifles and wore armbands. A young man – he must have been a Lithuanian – with rolled-up sleeves was armed with an iron crowbar. He dragged out one man at a time from the group and struck him with the crowbar with one or more ►



The death squads' architects were Himmler and Heydrich – Himmler as head of the SS and Heydrich as leader of the Einsatzgruppen.

The double *Siegrune* was used as the SS's insignia.



It symbolised victory in Nazi ideology.

blows on the back of his head. Within three quarters of an hour, he had beaten to death the entire group of 45 to 50 people in this way. I took a series of photographs of the victims. After the entire group had been beaten to death, the young man put the crowbar to one side, fetched an accordion and went and stood on the mountain of corpses and played the Lithuanian national anthem. I recognised the tune and was informed by bystanders that this was the national anthem."

Gunsilius took particular note of the behaviour of the civilian women and children, which he described as unbelievable: "After each man had been killed, they began to clap and when the national anthem started up, they joined in, singing and clapping. In the front row, there were women with small children in their arms," said the German soldier, recounting the bizarre scene in Kaunas.

"I found out from some people, who knew German, what was happening here. They explained to me that the parents of the young man who had killed the other people had been taken from their beds two days earlier and immediately shot, because they were suspected of being nationalists, and this was the young man's revenge. Not far away there was a large number of dead people, who according to the civilians had been killed by the withdrawing Commissars and Communists. While I was talking to the civilians an SS officer came up to me and tried

to confiscate my camera. I was able to refuse since in the first place the camera was not mine, but had been allocated to me for my work, and second I had a special pass from 16th Army High Command, which gave me authorisation to take photographs."

The fact that the SS tried to cover up the atrocities from the very start and even encouraged the murders was also clear to Colonel L Von Bischoffshausen, who witnessed the same event. He reported:

"Later on at staff headquarters, I discovered that my superiors knew about the killings of Jews. They were appalled but at the same time they made it clear that such acts constituted spontaneous retribution against Jewish traitors and collaborators for their mistreatment of Lithuanians during Soviet rule. Such horrific acts were therefore an internal matter which the Lithuanians had to resolve on their own, without outside interference."

Jews were killed to polka music

The German strategy of letting the locals kill the Jews did not last. As soon as the euphoria of liberation from the Soviets died down, so did the acts of revenge, and the death squads started carrying out their own executions. They were still helped by local militias, however, and fanned the flames as best they could.

"One must remember that it was the Jews who greeted the Red Army in July 1940 and enslaved,

The murders were methodical

The Germans' sense of order and efficiency came to the fore during the mass executions of Eastern European Jews.

The slaughter of Jews soon followed a definite pattern. The victims were forced to undress and discard their clothes and jewellery in separate piles. They were then ordered to line up along a trench. Then they were either shot from a distance with rifles or machine guns, or thrown alive into a grave and then shot from the edge.

Once the first group of Jews had been shot, the next stepped forward and stood on the side or were thrown into the grave on top of the bodies. The Nazis often used natural pits for the atrocities or forced locals or the Jews themselves to dig the graves. In this way, they saved time and labour. At the end of 1941, the killings were

further streamlined. A single soldier now carried out the mass executions with a machine gun. Another soldier had the sole task of supplying the first with bullets.

The killings were thus carried out on an assembly line, paving the way for industrialised mass murder – the Holocaust – in the death camps.

Jews were shot at the edge of a ditch, so they would fall straight into the grave, saving time.



tortured and killed Latvians during Communist rule,” wrote a pro-German newspaper in the town of Daugavpils in south-east Latvia.

Local collaborators, notably a group called the Arais Kommando, helped the Germans arrest and murder Jews. After the capture of Daugavpils at the end of June, the Nazis dragged a group of Jews out of the synagogue and shot them. Others were killed without warning as they walked the streets. On Sunday 29th June, the Germans rounded up a large group of Jewish men and imprisoned them in squalid conditions.

“They were seizing Jews in the streets of Dvinsk and taking them to the prison where they were severely tormented. They were forced to lie down on the ground and jump up again; those who could not do it fast enough were shot,” recalled Sema Shpungin, who survived the attacks in Daugavpils.

On 7th July, the number of imprisoned Jews in Daugavpils reached 1,225. A Jewish resident called Iwens recounted what happened next:

“On 8th July 1941, the Germans forced a detail of Jews to dig ditches in the Railroad Park. The next day, the Germans began shooting Jews and pushing the bodies into the ditches. The sound of gunshots, occurring at regular intervals, could be heard in the city. Among the murdered was one man who tried to explain to a guard that he was a decorated veteran of the German army from World War I. While the guards in this operation were

Latvian, the supervisors were entirely German. One German officer hummed the Beer Barrel Polka in between shooting people in the back of the head. The Germans filled all the trenches dug on 8th July with the bodies of the persons murdered on 9th July, but there were still a lot of people left alive whom they had intended to kill.

“At the end of the killings on 8th July, the survivors were put to work digging new graves and tamping down the earth over the bodies in the previous trenches. The next day, 10th July 1941, the killings resumed.”

Another survivor, Haim Kuritzky, reported:

“At a long ditch ... were four Latvian auxiliaries loading their rifles. A German officer yelled at the prisoners, ‘Four of you, march ahead.’ When the men reached the ditch, the German yelled ‘Fire!’ Each of the Latvians fired at one man – one bullet in the head at close range – and the four fell in the ditch. ‘The next four.’ They were shot, too. But then, the remaining prisoners were given spades and ordered to cover the ditches with dirt – there was no more room. The ditches were full of dying people and blood. They struggled spasmodically like fish out of water, heads hanging back, a wet, slippery, moving mass. All of the killing was being filmed by German soldiers.”

“I am completely unmoved”

The SS initially justified the killings as being in accordance with the order to disarm Germany’s enemies. Those killed were therefore proclaimed saboteurs, Bolsheviks and the like, and those murdered in June were still mostly men of fighting age. But being a woman was no guarantee against ►



The German executioners had to intoxicate themselves with large quantities of alcohol in order to carry out the mass killings of civilian men, women and children.



They don't think so much when they're digging. While they are working they are in fact calmer. ■ Felix Landau, SS-Hauptscharführer.

the attacks. SS-Hauptscharführer and Einsatzgruppe member Felix Landau discovered this when he was ordered to take part in an execution in July. The 31-year-old Landau had volunteered for the Einsatzgruppen, but was apparently not fully aware of what he had agreed to.

"I have little inclination to shoot defenceless people – even if they are only Jews. I would far rather good honest open combat," the SS soldier confided in his diary on 3rd July 1941.

A few days later, when Landau was in the town of Drohobycz in Ukraine, he nevertheless became part of the killings and thus the start of the

Holocaust: *"At 06.00 I was suddenly awoken from a deep sleep. Report for an execution. Fine, so I'll just play executioner and then gravedigger, why not? Isn't it strange, you love battle and then have to shoot defenceless people. Twenty-three had to be shot ... We drove one kilometre along the road out of town and then turned right into a wood. There were only six of us at that point and we had to find a suitable spot to shoot and bury them. After a few minutes we found a place.*

"The death candidates assembled with shovels to dig their own graves. Two of them were weeping. The others have incredible courage. Slowly the

Jews in captured towns
were systematically rounded up, taken to mass graves and killed on the edge of a trench.



hole gets bigger and bigger, two of them are crying continuously. I keep them digging longer and longer: they don't think so much when they're digging. While they are working they are in fact calmer. Valuables, watches and money, are put into a pile. When all of them have been brought to stand next to one another on a stretch of open ground, the two women are lined up at one end of the grave ready to be shot first. Two men had already been shot in the bushes. I did not see this as I had to keep my eyes on the others. As the women walked to the grave they were completely composed. They turned round. Six of us had to shoot them. The job

was assigned thus: three at the heart, three at the head. I took the heart. The shots were fired and the brains whizzed through the air. Two in the head is too much. They almost tear it off.

"Almost all of them fell to the ground without a sound. Only with two of them it didn't work. They screamed and whimpered for a long time. The penultimate group had to throw those who had already been shot into the mass grave then line up and fall in themselves. The last two had to place themselves at the front edge of the grave so that they would fall in at just the right spot. Then a few bodies were rearranged with a pickaxe and after that then we began the grave-digging work. I came back dog tired but the work went on. Strange, I am completely unmoved. No pity, nothing. That's the way it is and then it's all over," he wrote of the execution.

For some, it wasn't so easy to ignore their emotions, but the Germans got around that by supplying the executioners with copious amounts of alcohol, recalled Petras Zelionka, a member of the Lithuanian auxiliary police that assisted the death squads:

"It was a thoroughly unpleasant business to be involved in. But we were given as much to drink as we wanted. And after that, when the schnapps began to work, we all had the courage to take part in the operation. As the last men were brought forward, I fired as well."

Himmler escalated the murders

With the rapid advance of the German Army in the first weeks of the invasion, both the Germans and ►

FACTS

Between 1941 and 1945, the Einsatzgruppen murdered more than two million people. Of these, 1.5 million were Jews. Over the course of the war, between 5.5 and 6 million Jews were killed by the Germans.



Kiev's Jews were exterminated

After the war, the painter Nikolai Prakhov testified about one of Nazism's worst crimes – the massacre in the Babi Yar ravine near Kiev – now Kyiv, where over 33,000 Jews were killed.

"The greatest crime committed by the Germans was the mass shooting of the Jewish population of the city of Kiev on 29th September 1941.

"On the eve of that day, grey posters were hung up throughout the city. 'All the kikes of the city of Kiev and of its surroundings are to come on Monday 29th September 1941 at 08.00 to the corner of Melnik and Dokterivskaya Streets (near the cemeteries). They should bring with them their documents, money and valuables, as well as warm



clothes, linen, etc. Any kike who does not obey this order and is found in another place will be shot. Any citizen who enters an apartment left by the kikes and appropriates their belongings will be shot.'

"Since rail lines passed by the place designated as the gathering point, which is where people boarded the train during the Soviet evacuation of Kiev, many Jews thought that they were being collected for evacuation to some concentration camp in Germany and that was why the order required them to take linen and warm clothes.

"In our building, in apartment number 13, there lived a Jewish family, the Polyaks, consisting of a father and two adult daughters who did not manage to leave in time. The

father wrung his hands in desperation, [saying] that he had doomed his children. A poor old Jew lived in the courtyard near the back entrance to the dining room; he was proud that his adult son was sending him 25 roubles every month from Leningrad. He was taken to Lukyanovka by the horse of the boiler-man Comrade Markov, who said the following: 'When we approached the assigned place, it turned out that there was a fence behind which a German guard stood. The old man, who spoke poor German, asked him something, but he did not reply. When the old man repeated his question, the German hit him over the head with his rifle butt and killed him on the spot.'

"The citizeness [civilian] Lidia Viktorovna Nepadkevich, who was living at number 17 Podvalnaya Street, said that she went to see a neighbour, without suspecting anything bad. The guard to whom she showed her identity card was standing at the first fence and let them all in. Further on, a German officer was standing. After bidding farewell to her neighbour, Nepadkevich wanted to return home but the German barred her way, [saying]: 'Since you came here, you are not going to leave.' At that moment a large group of Jews arrived and, taking advantage of the fact that the officer rushed toward them, Nepadkevich headed for the exit. The first guard standing there apparently recognised her and, winking to her, pointed toward the exit.

"Afterwards people in the city said that all the Jews who had been collected in one place were stripped to their shirts, and that all of the 70,000 people (according to one version), or 80,000 (according to another) [the total number of murder victims was about 30,000] were driven to Babi Yar, where they were shot in a crossfire from machine and submachine guns. There were Ukrainians and Russians who died with the Jews. There were many mixed marriages in Kiev, [and] the husbands did not want to leave their Jewish wives and wives their [Jewish] husbands. After the shooting, the Germans brought prisoners of war, who were forced to dig trenches and bury the bodies. It was said that some of the bodies were buried using explosives. Only a few people managed to escape. I know that one man covered in blood entered the courtyard of house number 69 on Dorogozhinskaya (Melnik) Street, on the first floor of which the dentist Dina Fedorovna (I do not remember her last name but all of Lukyanovka knows her first name and her patronymic) was living and she happened to be home. It turned out that the man covered in blood was a Jew. He asked for water to wash himself and immediately left, saying, 'I was not here. You did not see me.'"

their accomplices harboured hopes that the war would soon be over and the horrors would end. From late July, however, the German forces faced stiff resistance, including fighting in and around the Soviet city of Smolensk.

As the front stalled, morale fell. Heinrich Himmler paid a series of visits to the death squads to assess the situation and encourage the soldiers. During these encounters, Himmler tightened up his orders to the Einsatzgruppen. In Baranavichy, in what is now Belarus, at the end of July, he met Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski, the leader of Einsatzgruppe B. He exhorted the death squads to make a special effort against the Reich's enemies in the swampy region.

"If the population, looked at in national terms, is hostile, racially and humanly inferior, or even, as will often be the case in marshy areas, composed of criminals who have settled there, then everyone who is suspected of supporting the partisans is to be shot; women and children are to be taken away, livestock and foodstuffs are to be confiscated and brought to safety. The villages are to be burned to the ground," Himmler decreed.

The SS commander's visit accelerated the killings. For example, Einsatzgruppen in the Zhytomyr region of Ukraine killed some 7,000 Jews between late July and mid-August alone. Whereas previously the groups had generally only targeted weapon-bearing

men, now they murdered men, women and children indiscriminately.

On 15th August, Himmler reached the newly captured Minsk, the capital of Belarus, and there he demanded to witness an execution. Himmler's adjutant, Obergruppenführer Karl Wolff, reported:

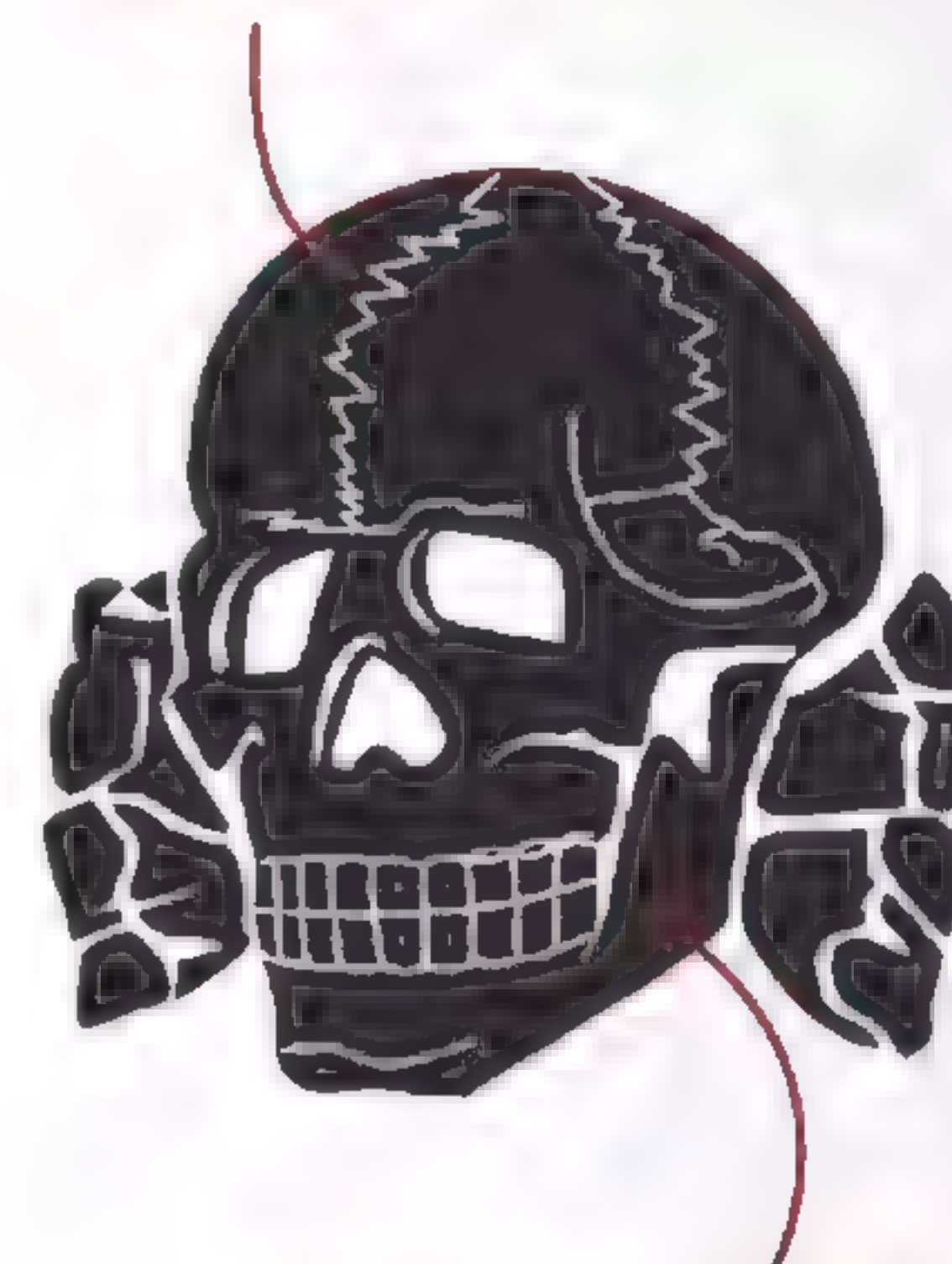
"An open grave had been dug and they had to jump into this and lie face downwards. And sometimes when one or two rows had already been shot, they had to lie on top of the people who had already been shot and then they were shot from the edge of the grave. And Himmler had never seen dead people before and in his curiosity, he stood right up at the edge of this open grave – a sort of triangular hole – and was looking in.

"While he was looking in, Himmler had the bad luck that from one or other of the people who had been shot in the head he got a splash of brains on his coat, and I think it also splashed into his face, and he went very green and pale; he wasn't actually sick, but he was heaving and turned round and swayed and then I had to jump forward and hold him steady and then I led him away from the grave."

The commander wasn't so shaken, however, that he couldn't stand up after the barbaric act to give the soldiers a declaration of support:

"After the shooting was over, Himmler gathered the shooting squad in a semi-circle around him ►

The Totenkopf adorned SS uniforms.



The skull and crossbones were meant to remind SS soldiers that they should always be willing to sacrifice their lives for their comrades.

Hitler's goal was *Lebensraum*, and the Nazis proceeded with unprecedented brutality. All Eastern European Jews were to be killed and the land given to German settlers.



1941

The systematic murders of the Jews begins with the arrival of the Einsatzgruppen in the Soviet Union. In just six months, they commit several major massacres.

June

In collaboration with Lithuanian collaborators, the Nazis begin murdering Jews in the forest of Paneriai near Vilnius. Up to 70,000 Jews are murdered here during the war.

and, standing up in his car, so that he would be a little higher and be able to see the whole unit, he made a speech. He had seen for himself how hard the task which they had to fulfil for Germany in the occupied areas was, but however terrible it all might be, even for him as a mere spectator, and how much worse it must be for them, the people who had to carry it out, he could not see any way round it.

"They must be hard and stand firm. He could not relieve them of this duty;

he could not spare them. In the interests of the Reich, in this hopefully Thousand-Year Reich ... they must do their duty however hard it may seem. ... [T]hen he drove off. And he left this police unit to sort out the future for themselves, to see if and how far they could come to terms with this – because for some it was a shock which lasted their whole lives."

With Himmler's visit and the orders and requests that followed, both verbal and written, the Einsatzgruppen's original limitations crumbled. From the end of August 1941, the death squads could do



Oct

At least 10,000 Jews are killed by Einsatzgruppen over three days in Dnipro, Ukraine.

Oct

At the end of October, the Nazis take only three days to kill up to 34,000 Jews in the Ukrainian city of Odessa.

Oct

On 29th October, the Nazis kill nearly 10,000 Jews in Kaunas, Lithuania; 4,273 of the victims are children.

almost anything they wanted, as long as they got rid of the Jews.

The fact that food was now scarce in some areas contributed to the escalation of the killings. The Germans regarded the Jews as *nutzlose Fresser* – useless eaters – so they had to be disposed of. The result was widespread massacres. In many areas, entire Jewish communities were exterminated. Men, women and children perished in mass murders carried out by death squads with increasing brutality and efficiency. On 16th September 1941, German Lieutenant Erwin Bingel witnessed barbarity that went far beyond anything he could have imagined. The day before, he had been ordered to report to the German commander in the town of Uman in Ukraine,

who ordered Bingel to set up guards along the area's railways and at the city's airport, where he discovered that someone had dug deep trenches in an open space. The next day, he spotted a large group of people – Jewish men, women and children – standing in there. Slowly, Erwin Bingel realised what was going on:

“When the people had crowded into the square in front of the airport, a few trucks drove up from the direction of the town. From these vehicles, a troop of Feldgendarmarie [military police] alighted, and were immediately led aside. A number of tables was then unloaded from one of the trucks and placed in a line at distances from each other. Meanwhile, a few more trucks with Ukrainian militiamen commanded by SS had arrived. These ▶

The Nazis regularly photographed their crimes. This shot was intercepted by the Polish Resistance and saved for the post-war trials.



militiamen had work tools with them and one of their trucks also carried chloride of lime.

"The truck now drove alongside these ditches and the men on it unloaded six to eight sacks of chloride of lime at intervals of 15 to 20 metres. In the meantime, a number of transport planes – Model Junkers 52 – had landed at the airport. Out of these stepped several units of SS soldiers who, having fallen in, marched up to the Feldgendarmarie unit, subsequently taking up positions alongside it. As could be discerned from the distance, the two units were obviously being sworn in. I was then informed by my interpreter, who was Jewish – which fact was known only to me

personally – that he had learned that the people had been brought together following upon an order which had been posted in the streets of Uman.

"The order was for all Jews in the town of Uman and its subdistrict of all ages to assemble for the purpose of a census of the Jewish population. Anyone not complying with this order would be punished 'most severely'. The result of this proclamation was, of course, that all persons concerned appeared as ordered. This relatively harmless summons, it was thought, could be connected in some way or other with the preparations we were observing. It was because we took the matter so lightly that we were all the more

At the forefront of the extermination of the Jews was the SS, to which the Einsatzgruppen belonged. All the men in this photo were convicted of war crimes after the war.



Their children were gripped by their little legs, and put to death with one stroke of a pistol butt or club. ■ Lieutenant Erwin Bingel.

horrified at what we witnessed during the next few hours."

Even children weren't spared

Bingel recounted how Uman's Jews were ordered to go forward to the tables that had been set up, where they are told to take off their clothes and hand over all their belongings. Then the naked people were forced to the trenches and lined up along the edge of the ditch, the German lieutenant later said when testifying about war crimes.

"The commandos marched in behind the line and began to perform the inhuman acts, the horror of which is now known to the whole world. With

pistols, these men mowed down the line with such zealous intent that one could have supposed this activity to have been their lifework.

"Even women carrying children a fortnight to three weeks old, sucking at their breasts were not spared this horrible ordeal. Nor were mothers spared the terrible sight of their children being gripped by their little legs, and put to death with one stroke of a pistol butt or club, thereafter to be thrown on the heap of human bodies in the ditch, some of which were not quite dead. Not before these mothers had been exposed to this worst of tortures did they receive the bullet that released them from this sight. The people in the first row thus having been killed in the most inhuman manner, those of the second row were now ordered to step forward. The men in this row were ordered to step out and were handed shovels with which to heap chloride of lime upon the still partly moving bodies in the ditch. Thereafter they returned to the tables and undressed.

"After that they had to set out on the same last walk as their murdered brethren, with one exception – this time the men of the alternative firing squad surpassed each other in cruelty, lest they lag behind their predecessors.

"The air resounded with the cries of the children and the tortured. With senses numbed by what had happened, one could not help thinking of wives and children back home who believed they had good reason to be proud of their husbands and fathers, who, they thought, were fighting heroically in the ranks of the German Army on behalf of the Fatherland, whilst the so-called Elite troop, always referred to as unique, perpetrated the most horrible acts of cruelty in the honourable uniform of a nation."

No one protested

Bingel was one of many army officers who witnessed the otherwise secret work of the death squads. Like him, many participated as unwilling helpers or simply as casual observers. Officer Peter von der Osten-Sacken, for example, recounted:

"Shortly after the occupation of the town in question by the Wehrmacht, the Jews were▶



FACTS

One of the worst massacres by the Einsatzgruppen took place near Riga, Latvia, in the Rumbula Forest.

25,000

Jews were killed there on 30th November and 8th December 1941 by Einsatzgruppe A.

rounded up in the market square. A horrifying sight. And many of the infantrymen who happened to be looking on couldn't understand it. They said: what's going on? ... We can't go along with this! You noticed this opposition even among the ordinary soldiers. But not all of them of course. Many were indifferent."

In any case, few dared to protest. And in the meantime, the violence escalated even further. In the last days of September 1941, the killings reached a peak. On 19th September, German forces occupied the Ukrainian city of Kiev (now Kyiv) after a long and gruelling battle. And ten days later – on 29th September – a major operation began against the city's Jews, who were ordered to assemble at the Babi Yar ravine, 10 kilometres north-west of the city centre.

Kiev's Jews called to assemble

Among them was Dina Mironovna Vasserman, an actress at Kiev's children's theatre. Dina's non-Jewish husband, Nikolai Pronichev, had been sent to the front like so many Russian men, and she was alone with two young children and her elderly mother when the Germans moved into Kiev. She read with

worry the posters the occupiers had hung in the city streets.

"When I saw announcements posted in the streets, ordering 'all the Jews of the city of Kiev to gather at Babi Yar' ... I felt trouble was coming. I saw nothing good was awaiting us there. That is why I dressed my children, three and five years old, packed their stuff in a small bag and took them to my Russian mother-in-law. Then, following the order, my sick mother and I went along the road to Babi Yar. Jews were walking in hundreds and thousands. Beside me there was an old Jew with a long white beard. He had on a [prayer shawl]... He prayed exactly as my father did when I was a child. A woman was walking ahead of me. She was carrying two children and a third one was walking alongside, holding her skirt. Sick women and elderly were riding in carts among piled-up bags and suitcases. Small children were crying. Old people, having trouble walking, sighed and trudged on in their mournful journey."

Vasserman heard the sound of gunshots and inhuman screams as she approached the Babi Yar ravine. When the group reached the gorge, Dina ►

The Jewish ghetto in Warsaw was cleared by the SS in 1943. By then, they had perfected their massacres and knew how to move old people, women and children without a struggle.





Report revealed gruesome killings

In 1963, a secret document came to light. The Jäger Report, which had been hidden in Soviet archives, revealed the systematic killing of Jews on the Eastern Front by the Einsatzgruppen.

The death squads regularly reported on the killings by SS soldiers on the Eastern Front. However, the Jäger Report, prepared by Standartenführer Karl Jäger, is the most detailed of the surviving documents. Jäger was the commander of Einsatzkommando 3, a unit of Einsatzgruppe A, which

accompanied Army Group North during Operation Barbarossa.

The report documents the unit's murders from 2nd July to 25th November 1941. Jäger gave a detailed account of the time, place and number of killed. The figures are chilling. Among other things, the report shows that

the killing rate reached more than 2,000 victims per day on 17 occasions. Five copies of the report were made, but only one has survived. It was found by Soviet soldiers when they liberated Lithuania. But only in 1963, when the GDR wanted to prosecute a former Nazi, did the Soviet Union release it.

THE REPORT consists of nine pages in total. This page covers the period between 12th September and 25th November 1941.

THE VICTIMS were divided into categories. Jews were further divided into the subcategories Jews, Jewesses and Jewish children. Jäger's command murdered over 34,000 Jewish children.

LOCATION DATA details where the killings took place. Einsatzkommando 3 operated in Lithuania, Latvia and Belarus. These records include killings in Lithuania's capital, Vilnius.

12.9.41	Vilna - Tsch...				
17.9.41					
20.9.41	Smencina	178	Juden, 176	Jüdinn.	97
22.9.41	Novo-Bileja	468			
24.9.41	Lisa	517	495	196	
25.9.41	Jankunai	215	744	211	
27.9.41	Yalicky	989	223	131	
30.9.41	Prabai	366	1636	871	
4.10.41	Vilna - Tsch...	432	402	97	
6.10.41	Malilaki	213	1115	426	
9.10.41	Avenciany	1169	339	336	
16.10.41	Vilna - Tsch...	382	1840	717	
21.10.41		718	207	257	
24.10.41		718	1063	286	
27.10.41		946	1116	612	
30.10.41		382	484	73	
31.10.41		340	173	162	
1.11.41		76	143	54	
2.11.41			17	2	
3.11.41					
4.11.41					
5.11.41					
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25.11.41					

THE TOTAL KILLINGS amount to 137,346 people. Jews made up the vast majority, with over 135,000 murdered. The second largest category, Communists, numbered 1,064, while 653 were mentally disabled and 134 fell into the 'other' group.

**Under me and above me there lay the killed and wounded.
Some of them breathed, others moaned. ■ Dina Mironovna Vasserman.**

and her mother were told to hand over their documents and valuables, and remove their clothes. Even the wedding ring was ripped from Dina's mother's hand by an impatient guard, and then the cruel truth dawned on Vasserman and her mother.

"Mother said: 'Dinochka, you are Pronicheva, you are Russian. You should survive. Rush to your children. You should live for them.' But I could not flee. We were surrounded by fascists with submachine guns, Ukrainian policemen and ferocious dogs who were ready to tear a human being to pieces. And then, I could not leave my mother alone. I embraced her, burst into tears but was unable to leave her. Mother pushed me away and yelled: 'Hurry!' I went to a table at which a fat officer was seated, showed him my passport and said quietly, 'I am Russian.'"

This was critical for Dina Vasserman. As a married Russian woman, she would be allowed to escape the massacre, but while the officer was examining her passport, a Ukrainian policeman came up and snapped: "Don't believe her, she's a kike. We know her." Vasserman recalled: "The German told me to

step aside and wait. I saw groups of men, women, children and elderly undress. Then they were taken to an open pit and shot by soldiers. Then another group would come."

Children and adults were buried alive

The Babi Yar ravine, which stretched out in front of Dina Vasserman, was about 10 metres deep, 400 metres long and 80 metres wide, and the makeshift grave was quickly filling up with victims of the death squad – including very young Jews, the young woman reported:

"I saw a young completely naked woman feed her naked baby with the breast when a policeman came to her, took the baby, and thrust it into the pit. The mother rushed after the child. A fascist shot her dead, and she fell into the pit."

"The German who had ordered me to wait took me to his superior, gave him my passport and said, 'This woman says she is Russian, but a policeman says she is Jewish.' The officer studied my passport for a while and then said, 'Dina is not a Russian name. You are Jewish. Take her!'"

"A policeman told me to undress and pushed me to the edge of the pit where another group was waiting for its fate. But before the shooting

Leaflets ordered the Jews of Kiev to the Babi Yar ravine. There they were all brutally executed and buried in mass graves.

Все жидаы города Киева и его окрестностей должны явиться в понедельник 29 сентября 1941 года к 8 часам утра на угол Мельниковой и Доктеривской улиц (возле кладбища).

Взять с собой документы, деньги и ценные вещи, а также теплую одежду, белье и пр.

Кто из жидаов не выполнит этого распоряжения и будет найден в другом месте, будет расстрелян.

Кто из граждан проникнет в оставленные жидами квартиры и присвоит себе вещи, будет расстрелян.

Наказується всім жидам міста Києва і околиць зібратися в понеділок дня 29 вересня 1941 року до год. 8 ранку при вул. Мельникова — Доктерівській (коло кладовища).

Всі повинні забрати з собою документи, гроші, білизну та інше.

Хто не підпорядкується цьому розпорядженню буде розстріляний.

Хто займе жидівське мешкання або розграбує предмети з тих мешкань, буде розстріляний.

Специальные жиды города Киева и окрестностей должны явиться в понедельник 29 сентября 1941 года к 8 часам утра на угол Мельниковой и Доктеривской улиц (возле кладбища). Взять с собой документы, деньги и ценные вещи, а также теплую одежду, белье и пр. Кто из жидов не выполнит этого распоряжения и будет найден в другом месте, будет расстрелян. Кто из граждан проникнет в оставленные жидами квартиры и присвоит себе вещи, будет расстрелян.



started, I, driven by terror, fell into the pit. I fell on dead bodies. At first, I could not understand anything: where was I? How did I get there? I thought I had gone mad. But when people started falling on me, I came to my senses and understood everything. I started checking my arms, legs, abdomen, head. It turned out I was not even wounded. I pretended to be dead. Under me and above me there lay the killed and wounded. Some of them breathed, others moaned. Suddenly, I heard a child cry, 'Mommy!'

"It seemed like it was my little daughter. I burst into tears."

Vasserman was one of the few to survive the mass executions on the Eastern Front. Almost all the survivors had somehow avoided being shot when it had been their turn, and then fell into the graves on top of the dead and wounded. This included Dina, who remembered how the shooting just went on and on for hours as bodies fell on top of her. Afraid of being buried alive, she shook off the bodies carefully so as not to attract the attention of the executioners.

"All of a sudden everything was quiet. It was getting dark. Germans with submachine guns were killing those who had been wounded. I felt



150,000 people were murdered at Babi Yar during the war. Today, there is a memorial to the victims at the site.

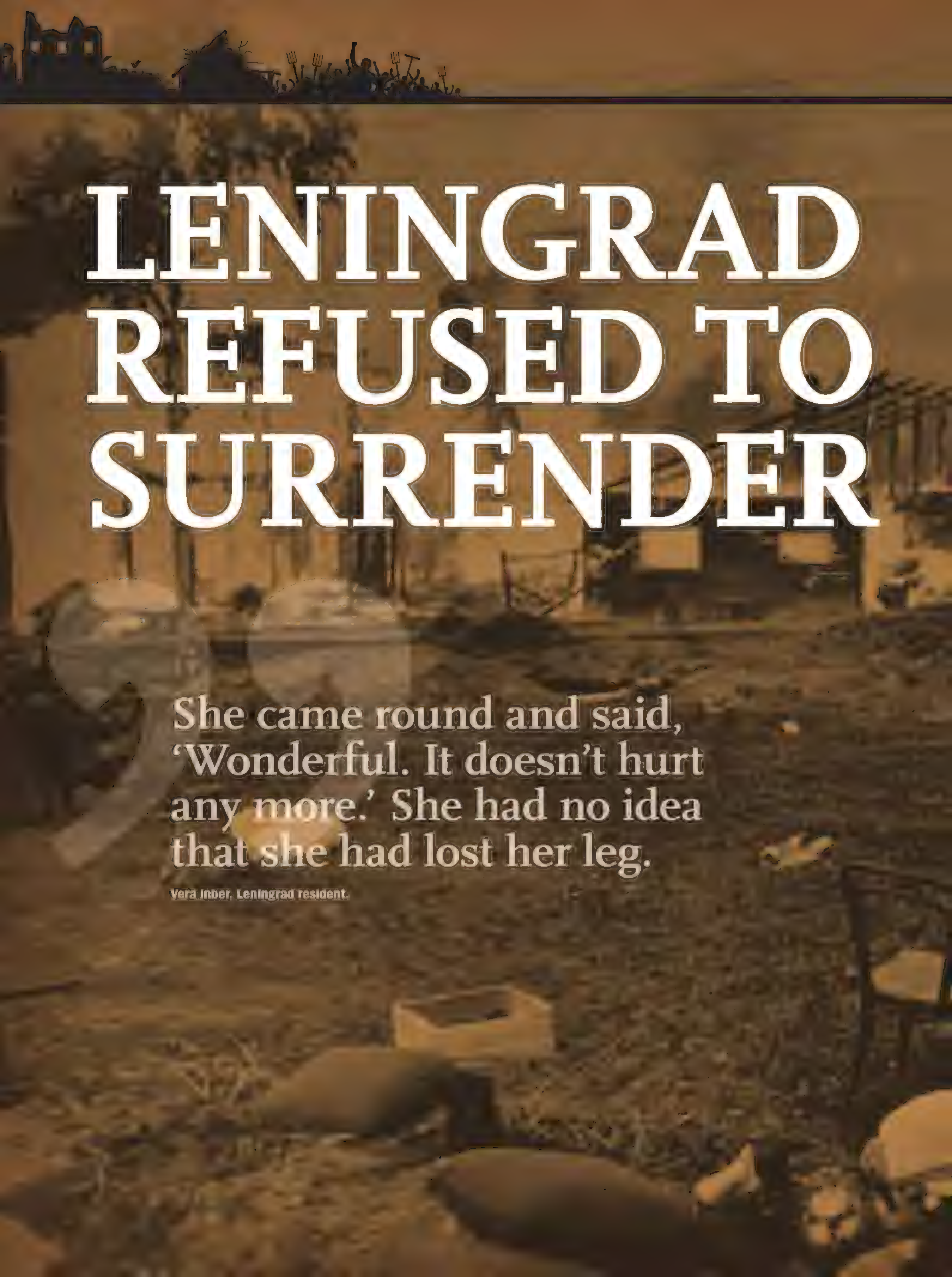
someone was standing above me, but pretended to be dead, no matter how hard it was. Then I felt we were covered with earth. I closed my eyes to protect them. When it became completely dark and quiet – deadly quiet in the literal sense – I opened my eyes and, having made sure no one was around and watching me, I dug myself out of the sand that was covering me.

"I saw the ditch filling with thousands of killed. I looked at myself and got scared. The undershirt that was covering my body was all bloody. I tried to get up and could not. Then I said to myself: 'Dina, get up, leave, run from here, your children are waiting for you.'"

Only 28 people survived the horrors of Babi Yar out of the more than 30,000 Jews who were herded into the gorge near Kiev in late September 1941. The killings were so numerous and happened so quickly that the mass grave was moving when German soldier Walther Gehrke passed it shortly after the atrocity had taken place. Not all the victims were dead, it seemed, and it was a sight that he would never forget.

The Babi Yar massacre was the culmination of the mass shootings on the Eastern Front in 1941. Just 150 Einsatzgruppen men, aided by enthusiastic Ukrainians, carried out the grisly deed, and historians have calculated the killing rate at nearly 1,000 Jews an hour, or one every four seconds. The death squads had achieved an uncanny efficiency – a skill the Germans would develop to gruesome perfection in the months and years to follow. Before World War II ended, the Einsatzgruppen would murder some 1.5 million Jews in Eastern Europe, and the Nazi death machine would claim the lives of more than six million Jews, the majority murdered in the gas chambers of Poland's concentration camps. ■





LENINGRAD REFUSED TO SURRENDER

She came round and said,
'Wonderful. It doesn't hurt
any more.' She had no idea
that she had lost her leg.

Vera Inber, Leningrad resident.

Leningrad, autumn 1941



The Germans planned to
capture the industrial city
of Leningrad in a matter of
weeks. However, they got
no further than its outskirts.

Leningrad refused to surrender

As the Germans stormed Leningrad, General Georgy Zhukov ordered everything to be put into defending the city. Thousands of civilians were sent to dig defences, citizen militias exercised in the city squares and soldiers formed a ring around the city. The Germans had to be stopped here.

By Else Christensen

Joseph Orbeli was a far-sighted man. Throughout the spring and summer of 1941, he discreetly ordered packing materials for his museum, the Hermitage in Leningrad. When German forces crossed the border on 22nd June, he was the happy owner of 50 tonnes of wood shavings, three tonnes of cotton wool and 16 km of wax cloth. The soft, shock-absorbing materials come in handy when the museum staff started packing away the many fine works of art immediately after the invasion.

They carefully wrapped hundreds of sculptures, paintings and porcelain vases, and packed them in boxes. Under heavy guard, the boxes were carried aboard a train that left the city, heading for the Ural Mountains. The museum director's caution was understandable. The Nazis never made any secret of the fact that Leningrad was high on the list of cities that Hitler wanted to control. For the next three months, the Nazis doggedly pursued their goal. And the Red Army equally stubbornly defied the Germans.

Revolution began in Leningrad

There were solid practical reasons for the Nazis to occupy Leningrad. As well as being the country's second largest city, Leningrad was home to the Soviet Union's Baltic Fleet and a busy trading port. The city was also one of its largest and most important industrial centres, but just as important to Hitler was Leningrad's history. The city, known as St Petersburg

in Tsarist times, was not only the capital of the old Russian Tsarist Empire, but also the birthplace of Bolshevism. It was here in April 1917 at the city's Finland Station that Lenin returned from his long exile to promise the people "the victory of the proletariat". And here, six months later – in October 1917 – the Red Guards launched the Russian Revolution by storming the Tsar's Winter Palace. Taking the city would thus be seen as a significant propaganda victory for the Nazis.

The task of subduing Leningrad fell to Army Group North, in what the Germans expected to be another fine display of blitzkrieg. The troops' initial advance did not disappoint. In just three days, Army Group North had occupied most of Lithuania, and the following day the soldiers managed to establish a bridgehead across the Latvian river Dvina.

"It was unlikely that I should ever again live through anything comparable to the impetuous dash of 56 Panzer Corps in the first days of the campaign – the fulfilment of all a tank-force commander's dreams," German General Erich von Manstein later wrote in his memoirs.

At this point, Manstein encountered difficulties. Part of his main force had moved away to defeat Soviet units, but was suddenly met by enemies from both north and south. As reinforcements arrived from several major Soviet cities, the situation suddenly became grave for Manstein's soldiers.

"Before long we were having our work cut out to beat off the attacks he launched on the northern bank of the Dvina with an armoured division in support, and at a number of points the position became quite critical. In the course of a counter-attack made by 3rd Panzer Division to recover some temporarily abandoned ground, our troops found the bodies of three officers and 30 men who had lain wounded in a field dressing-station captured by the enemy the previous day. Their mutilations were indescribable."

"In the next few days, the Soviet Air Force did everything possible to destroy the bridges which had been allowed to fall into our hands. With an almost mulish obstinacy, one squadron after another flew in at treetop level, only to be shot down by our fighters or Flak."

The hard fighting meant that Manstein was only able to resume the advance towards Leningrad on

Leningrad was where the Bolsheviks launched the Russian Revolution. It made the city a symbolic target for the Nazis.



2nd July after more than a week of stalemate. It would prove to be just the first of many problems that would beset the general's advance towards Leningrad.

Women dug defences

As the fighting went on, Leningrad prepared for the attack. While Hermitage staff were busy packing up artefacts, the city government mobilised all able-bodied men between 16 and 50, and all women between 16 and 45 – except those with young children. Some were assigned to dig shelters and camouflage public buildings – for example, conscripts shrouded the Smolny, a stately pillared building that housed Lenin's office during the revolution, in a huge net, while amateur mountaineers scaled the Admiralty Building's golden spire to repaint it green.

More than 50,000 civilians, mostly women and teenagers, were ordered to dig defences along the Luga River about 100 km south-west of Leningrad. Olga Grechina, a 17-year-old student at Leningrad University, was one of the thousands of teenagers released to work on the Luga Line. During the work, the conscripts boarded with local host families. Grechina described the work of digging defences:

"It was to dig anti-tank ditches (1.2 m deep) and breastworks (supposedly 1 m high). Though our only tools were shovels, axes and stretchers [to

carry soil], we set to work enthusiastically. The days were sunny and hot. We worked from 05.00 to 20.00 or 21.00, with a two- or three-hour rest after lunch. We were well fed but there was no tea, except for what our landlady made us from lime flowers. Physically it was very tough, and after two weeks, trying to lift a stretcher, I suddenly found I couldn't straighten up again."

Others, like fellow student Yelena Kochina, were exposed to far greater dangers. German planes constantly flew over the line during excavation work, dropping bombs and attacking the workers.

"Our whole laboratory dug anti-tank trenches around Leningrad today. I dug the earth with pleasure (at least this was something practical!) ... Suddenly the gleaming wings of an aeroplane blotted out the sky. A machine gun started firing and bullets plunged into the grass not far from me, rustling like small metallic lizards. I stood transfixed, forgetting completely the air-raid drill that I had learned not long before. 'Run!' someone shouted, tugging at my sleeve. I looked back. Everyone who had been working in the trenches had run somewhere. I ran, too, though I didn't know where to go or what to do ... Suddenly I saw a small bridge. I ran towards it. Under it was a deep puddle. For a whole hour we squatted in ▶

Bicycles helped the infantry to keep up with the motorised units. They required no fuel and were easy to maintain and repair.



A machine gun started firing and bullets plunged into the grass not far from me. ■ Resident of Leningrad.

this puddle, and didn't do any more work for the rest of the day," Kochina confided to her diary.

Historic town was laid to ruins

On 4th July, as German ground forces rapidly approached, General Georgy Zhukov ordered his forces to move out to defend Leningrad. The first soldiers took up positions on the Luga Line on 12th July. The following day, they launched a counter-attack. The weather was unusually hot – 30° C in the shade – and the Germans, not having anticipated a robust response, were almost blown away. In the chaos, Soviet forces even managed to drive a wedge between the main force and a motorised infantry division. The encirclement forced the stunned Germans into fierce fighting that lasted several days. When the Germans finally broke free on 18th July, one division had lost 70 of its 150 tanks. A few days later, on 3rd August, another German force struck the historic town of Staraya Russa, an important point on the route to Leningrad:

"An immediate preparation was provided by an aerial attack from VIII Fliegerkorps against the still undamaged portions of Staraya Russa, which with its many towers and churches still presented

a picture of old Russia, and turned it into rubble and ash," one German war diary reported. "Infantry Regiment 426 crossed the Polist on the tree trunks laying in the river and was able to push to the west edge of the city without any large enemy resistance.

"After strong artillery preparation, an enemy counter-attack to recapture the city struck these movements. The Russians managed to push into the southern portion of the city, especially in the spa garden area. Throughout the entire night, heavy close combat raged in the burning sea of houses ... On this occasion, luck was on our side. The enemy, who apparently wanted to attack as well, was caught in the jump-off positions by our artillery and so smashed that he quickly retreated to the east ... Unfortunately, this success was expensive. The Division had to mourn 49 killed and 118 wounded. After the hard casualties of the previous days this was a new loss which for the time being could not be replaced."

The defensive fortifications around Leningrad were built by men too old to fight in the army, who worked alongside women.

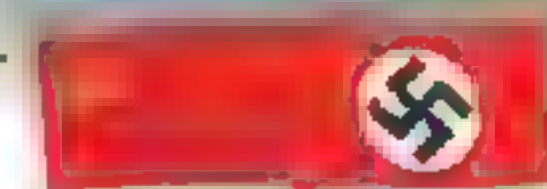
Finns took revenge

The Germans faced several problems on the road to Leningrad. The Red Army managed to surround the ►



The Red Army attacked the enemy like a swarm of locusts

Moscow ●
Berlin ●



The success of German forces in the early months of World War II was due primarily to the army's use of blitzkrieg. The tactic was to identify the weakest point in the enemy line, break through with a surprise attack and then – while the enemy was still in shock – surround its forces.

Soviet forces were more thorough. Drawing on defeats in previous wars, including World War I, the Soviet general staff, Stavka, adopted a new technique in the 1930s. Where the Tsarist armies had been content simply to fight

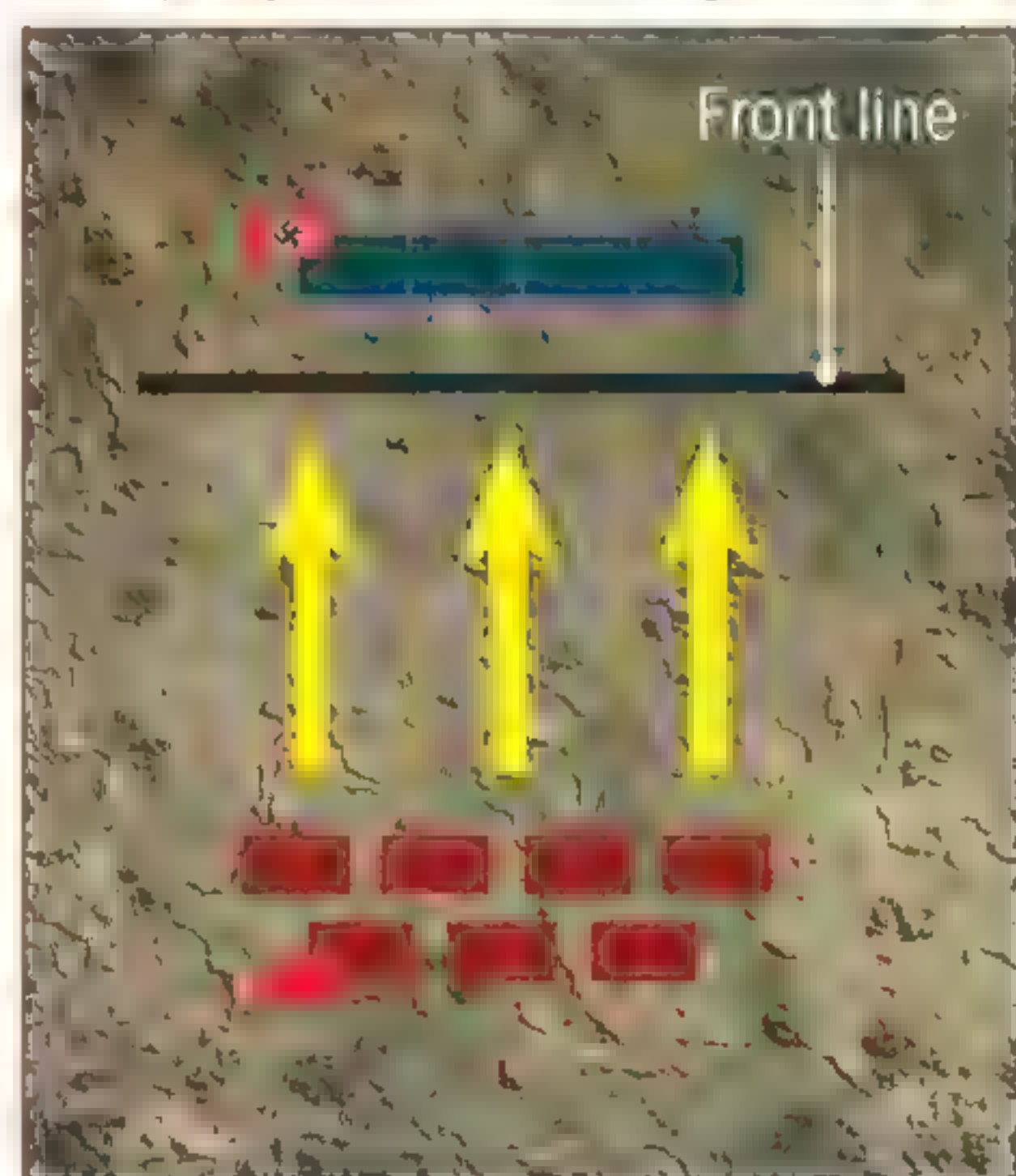
their opponents using positional warfare, the Red Army now had to move deep behind enemy lines, destroying supply and communication lines to such an extent that the enemy could not regroup and retaliate later.

The tactic, known as deep operations, was developed by General Vladimir Triandafillov, who outlined the strategy in two books on warfare published in the 1920s. The Red Army developed it further throughout the 1930s, and it came to form the playbook for Soviet warfare in World War II.



Panzer units spearheaded the Germans' pioneering blitzkrieg.

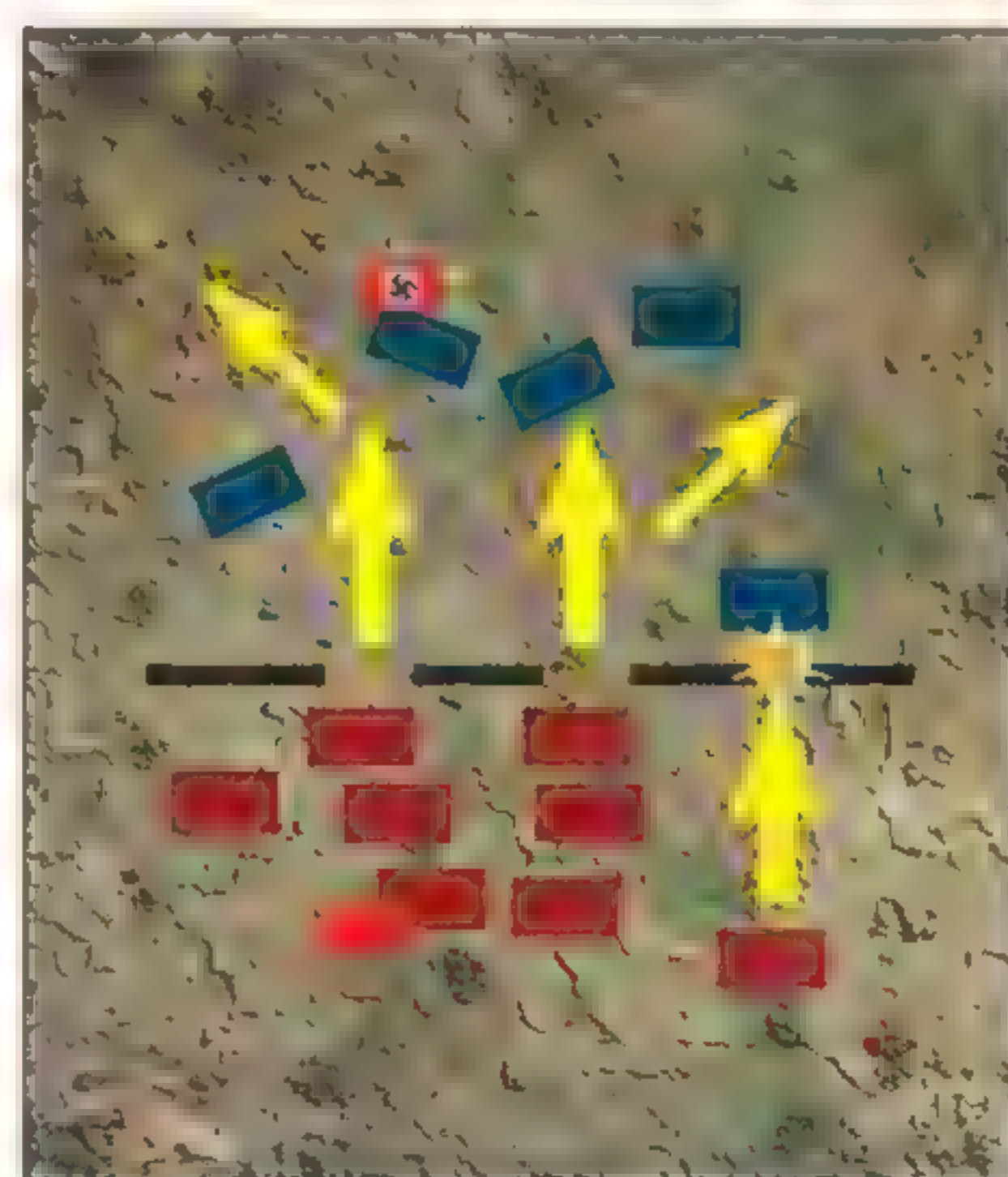
Deep operations required lots of soldiers



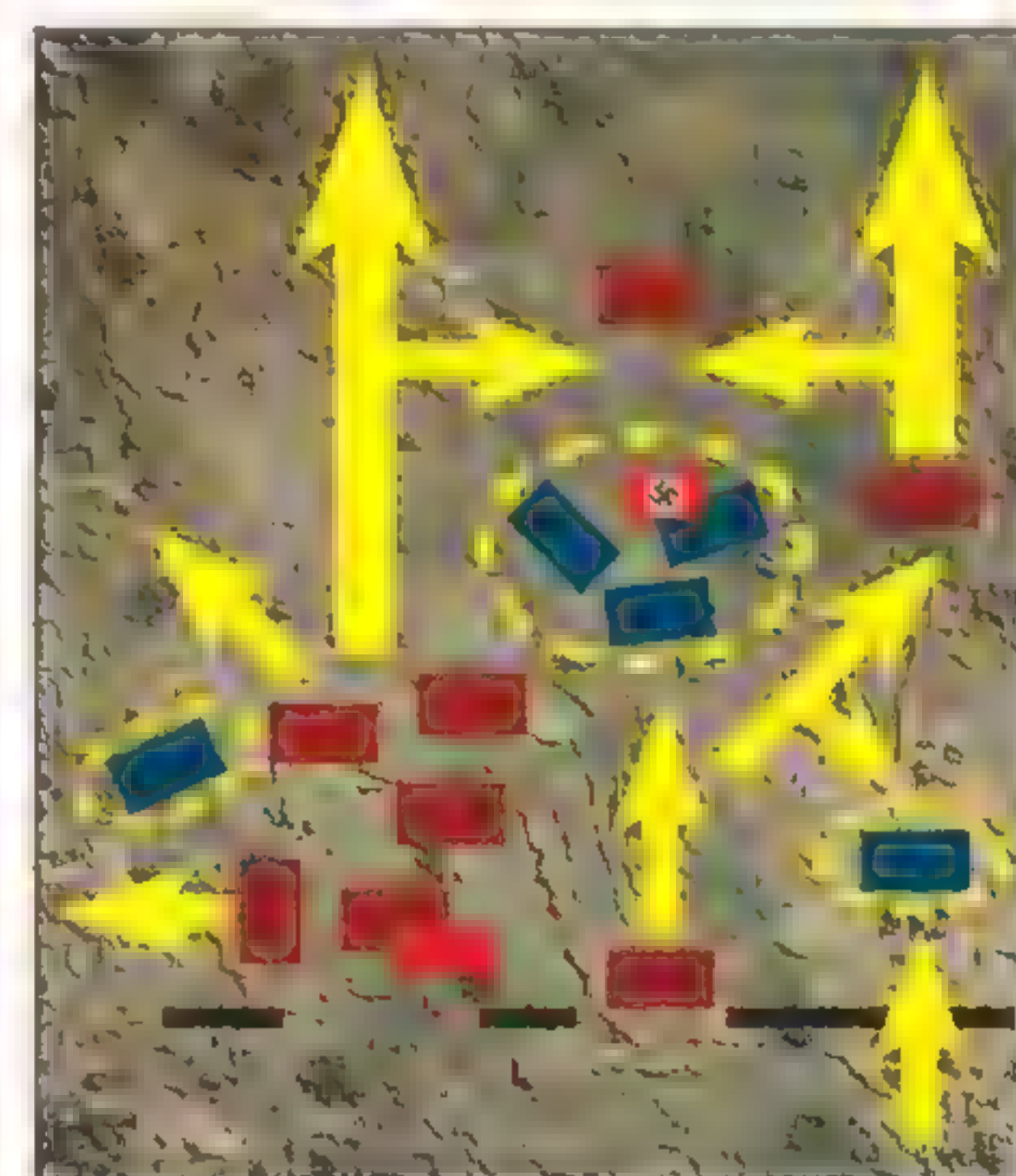
1 The deep operation relied on the Red Army's main asset – its countless soldiers. An attack began with a massive assault across a broad front, so the enemy couldn't defend the entire line.



2 Reserve troops then reinforced the attacking force to put additional pressure on the defenders. The enemy would begin to buckle and gaps would appear in the defensive lines.



3 Attacking troops shouldn't stop when they penetrated enemy lines, but instead continue forward. However, parts of the force had to try to catch the defenders in a 'pincer'.



4 The main force had to penetrate deep behind enemy lines to destroy its lines of communication and supply, so the enemy's troops were completely isolated and could be defeated.

Blitzkrieg created artificial superiority



1 The Germans couldn't afford to 'waste' soldiers to the same extent. The blitzkrieg tactic picked the enemy's weakest point and directed all forces to the spot in an attack led by armoured units.



2 Panzer forces broke through enemy lines. Infantry followed on their heels, making it possible to split and artificially create superiority against a numerically larger enemy.



3 Parts of the assault force swung around, and the enemy troops were surrounded in a pincer manoeuvre. The main force continued to advance to give the enemy no time to regroup.



The Red Army used its numerical superiority to carry out deep operations.

German *X Armee* (X Army Corps). From the north, General Manstein had to rush to the rescue. On 19th August, he struck a surprise attack. While Manstein attacked the Soviets from outside the pocket, the enclosed Germans fought their way out from where they were trapped. After three days, the Soviet pincer manoeuvre was broken. Manstein claimed to take 12,000 prisoners and seized or destroyed 1,412 tanks and 246 guns. The Soviet soldiers who avoided capture fled in a wild panic.

The Red Army now found itself facing more than just the Germans. Finland also joined the offensive against Leningrad. During the Winter War against the Soviet Union in 1939-40, Finland had lost the Karelian Isthmus – an area between Lake Ladoga and the Gulf of Finland, as well as its immediate surroundings. Operation Barbarossa gave Finland the chance it had been waiting for. On 25th June 1941,

the Finnish Parliament declared war on the Soviet Union. By joining the German advance towards Leningrad, they could win back their lost territory.

Finland's commander-in-chief, Marshal Carl Gustaf Mannerheim, immediately ordered his forces to advance south across the Karelian Isthmus towards Leningrad. Their advance was rapid.

The Finnish soldiers knew the terrain from the previous year's Winter War, and they also had support from both the Finnish Air Force and the Luftwaffe. On 29th August, the Finns took the town of Vyborg – around 150 km from Leningrad. Finnish soldier Eino Luukkanen visited the town where he used to live:

"Closer to Viipuri [Vyborg], the aftermath of battle was still fresh, and as all the bridges had been blown, we had to drive cautiously over temporary plank bridges, which threatened to pitch us into the water at any moment ... Although

Hitler tried – and failed – several times to persuade the Finns and Field Marshal Mannerheim (left) to attack Leningrad.



In the mud lay not just a few individual soldiers, not even tens or hundreds of them, but huge piles of mutilated and bloody corpses. ■ Holger Hørsholt Hansen, Danish journalist.

I had lived in Viipuri, I could hardly recognise the city. The superb railway station ... claimed to have been the most beautiful in the whole of northern Europe, was now a pile of rubble, and few buildings stood unscathed."

Luukkanen walked among the ruins, climbed over piles of rubble and saw no more than a few people during his entire stay in the city.

"Feeling thoroughly miserable, we continued on through Viipuri until we reached Sainio, where I had left much of my spare clothing and kit during the Winter War. Near the badly damaged hospital the horrible odour of burned human flesh assailed our nostrils, and we hastily turned away.

"Sainio's railway station and the Terijoki highway areas were jammed by the shattered remains of tanks, armoured cars, tracked vehicles and trucks, and it was with difficulty that we managed to edge our way through the tangled wreckage. There was no sign of the house that we were endeavouring to find, but then all that was left in this area, apart from the foundations of a large store, were corpses, the bloated carcasses of horses, heaps of ashes and mounds of debris. We had seen more than enough and, turning the car around, we headed back in the direction from which we had come."

Shocking death toll

During the Finnish advance, most of the Soviet 115th and 123rd Divisions managed to escape. The Finns fought the fleeing soldiers in a gigantic battle east of Vyborg on 1st September.

Danish journalist Holger Hørsholt Hansen, war correspondent for the US news agency Associated Press and the Danish newspaper *Politiken*, was among a group of reporters visiting the area shortly after the big battle:

"When [we] arrived at the battlefield, the Finnish troops were still occupied with the extermination of minor enemy groups who had slipped into the forest to continue the fighting from there. To arrive at such a theatre of war immediately after the fighting has ended – in this case it was the day after – is a terrible experience. Long before we reached the 6 km² area, we were met by a choking stench. In this 'Motti' of Hell were not just individual soldiers, not tens or hundreds of them, but huge piles of mutilated and bloody corpses. Hundreds of dead horses added to the poisoning of the air. The sight was terrible and simply beyond description. Blown-up bodies with intestines pouring out of big, gaping wounds, dead Russian and Finnish soldiers side by side in twisted positions, and terribly mutilated.

"The destruction was so complete it was hard to believe that this could take place in the year of our

Finland wanted revenge on the Soviets

Operation Barbarossa provided an opportunity for the Finns to settle an old score. By allying with Germany, Finland could regain territory lost in the Winter War.

The Winter War, which had begun when the Soviet Union invaded Finland in November 1939, cost the country dearly. The Finns held out for 105 days, but when the forces finally succumbed, they could count more than 26,000 dead. When peace was declared on 13th March 1940, the country had lost 13 percent of its original territory, including the entire Karelian Isthmus and the city of Vyborg, the country's second largest.

The fact that until December 1917 Finland had belonged to Russia only made the defeat all the more bitter. After a brief period of freedom and

independence, the great neighbour to the east had cast long shadows over the country once again. For example, the Finnish government had to refuse to enter into a defensive alliance with Sweden in early 1940, when Soviet protests over the proposal made Finns fear invasion.

When the Soviet Union invaded the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in June 1940, Finnish fears increased. Operation Barbarossa, launched a year later, seemed to offer the Finnish government not just the best, but the only, way to secure Finland's future – and to teach Stalin a lesson.



In June 1941, Finnish soldiers crossed the no man's land that had been the border with the Soviet Union since the end of the Winter War.

Lord 1941, in 'the century of culture and civilisation' ... The most terrible [thing] of all was the sight of the fallen soldiers, whose distorted faces spoke of the unbelievable pain they must have suffered. The bodies lay distended and black in the bright autumn sunshine, their arms reaching up to the sky in despair."

Soviet losses were considerable – nearly 50 tanks, 300 guns, over 700 trucks and 4,500 horses. The ►

1941-1944

Hitler wanted to wipe Leningrad off the map and starve its residents to death. For 872 days, Leningrad was famished and frozen before the Germans had to abandon their plans.

1941

In September 1941, German and Finnish forces surround Leningrad. All roads into the city are hermetically sealed, and supplies can only enter via the frozen Lake Ladoga.



The Norsupyssy (Elephant gun) was the nickname for the Lahti L-39 weapon, which Finnish soldiers carried during the invasion of the Soviet Union.

1941

In July, Hitler orders an offensive. In September, he's forced to halt the attack because of the coming of winter.

1941

In January, the Red Army launches Operation Iskra. The forces break a gap in German lines to create a land supply route to the city.

1941

In January, after two years, four months, two weeks and five days, the Germans abandon their positions around Leningrad.



Finns also managed to capture more than 9,000 Soviet soldiers and officers. Finnish paramedic Gunnar Bergström told how he captured the commander of the Red Army's 43rd Division, Vladimir Kirpitsnikov:

"I went into the forest and caught sight of two enemies lying there with rain ponchos pulled up over their heads. I pulled the poncho off one of them and saw to my amazement a living person looking up at me with staring eyes. He wore the insignia of a major general and I immediately grabbed his hands and helped him stand up. I first took the general's 9-mm Mauser pistol from him, then his thick map briefcase and finally his big canteen, which turned out to contain three quarters of a litre of vodka."

The Finns were now just 20 km from the northern outskirts of Leningrad. Here, however, the advance of the forces ended. The country was in dire straits; as much as 16 percent of the population was engaged in work that served only the war effort. If the country committed more troops, then critical parts of its industry and agriculture would grind to a halt. In addition, the Finns feared Stalin's wrath if the attack failed.

While the Finns still fought on the Karelian Isthmus, German Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel asked Mannerheim to join the attack. He refused, and when on 31st August 1941 the Germans again asked the Finns for help in taking Leningrad, the answer was the same. The Germans tried one last time on 6th September, when Alfred Jodl, Chief of Staff of the German High Command, visited Helsinki. The Finns refused to continue the offensive against the city. The Germans would have to take Leningrad themselves.

Leningrad must be starved

Two days later on 8th September, German forces had surrounded most of Leningrad and cut off all supply lines. At 18.55 the same day, the air was filled with the piercing and ominous sound of air raid sirens and factory whistles. Shortly afterwards, a formation of more than 20 grey bombers buzzed low over the besieged city. Here they dropped their cargo

of incendiary bombs, which ignited a sea of flames as they struck.

Three and a half hours later, at 22.34, the Luftwaffe returned. As the bombers' bays opened, they released 48 high-explosive bombs. The bombardment targeted the city's food and fuel supplies. An oil depot, a dairy and 38 warehouses were hit – all near the site housing most of the city's food stocks. 24 people lost their lives.

The bombardment was only the beginning of a long series of attacks. On 19th September, German aircraft dropped as many as 528 high-explosive bombs and ►

Several weapons were produced in Leningrad, including the KV-2 tank.



The heavy tank was built at the Kirov arms factory.



Shells rained down on the people of Leningrad, who had to fight for their lives every day in a city without food.

FACTS

The German siege of Leningrad saw up to **1,500,000** soldiers and civilians starve to death. The death toll peaked in the winter of 1942, when starvation killed around **100,000** Soviets every month.

2,000 incendiary bombs. The bombs hit a shopping centre, killing 39 people. Four hospitals and the working-class district of Novaya Derevnaya were also badly damaged. Writer Vera Inber saw around 50 wounded being brought to a hospital:

"One [was] a child of about seven years old. She kept complaining that the rubber tourniquet on her leg hurt. People comforted her, telling her that the pain would soon ease. Then she was anaesthetised, and the leg amputated. She came round and said, 'Wonderful. It doesn't hurt any more.' She had no idea that she had lost her leg."

Meanwhile, German High Command decided occupying the city wasn't practical at this time.

"It is the Führer's firm decision to level Moscow and Leningrad and make them uninhabitable, so as to relieve us of the necessity of having to feed the populations through the winter. The cities will be razed by the air force. Tanks must not be used for that purpose," Halder recorded in his diary after a meeting on 21st September, and so it was decided that the city should instead be starved into submission.

Many residents were already short of food. Yelena Skryabina had to use all her ingenuity to provide food

for her two sons, her mother and the family's elderly former nanny. In mid-September, she managed to get some food from some farmers on the outskirts of Leningrad. A few days later, after queuing outside a shop for hours, she got hold of a bottle of vodka, which she traded for some potatoes from an elderly woman who was clearly drunk.

"Lucky for us that there are still such old women around," she remarked dryly.

But as time passed, hunger became ever present. Skryabina noted the changes among the families in the apartment complex where she lived.

"People turn into animals before our eyes. Who would have thought that Irina, always such a quiet, lovely woman, would be capable of beating her husband, who she has always adored? And for what? Because he wants to eat all the time and can never get enough ... The most grisly sight in our apartment is the Kurakin family. He, back from exile and emaciated by years in prison, is already beginning to bloat ... Their children cry and beg for food. But all they get is beatings."

Skryabina's family were better off than most. Thanks to an access pass to the canteen at the

barracks where her husband worked, she could obtain soup and porridge for the family. Even with these regular meals, however, hunger still plagued the family. The city government introduced rationing, which gradually worsened throughout the siege.

By the end of November 1941, everyone conducting manual labour received 250 g of bread and some meat and fat. Children and others without work had to make do with just 155 grams a day. Although Skryabina's 15-year-old son, who occasionally worked chopping firewood and shovelling snow, received the higher ration, it wasn't enough, she confided to her diary:

"He has lost interest in everything. He won't read or talk ... he's even indifferent to bombing. The only thing that rouses him is food. He's hungry all day long and rattles through the cupboards, looking for something to eat. When he can't find anything he chews on coffee grounds or those abominable oil cakes which used to be fed only to cattle ... He spends whole days standing next to the stove in his winter jacket, pale, with deep blue circles under his eyes. If he goes on like this he will die."

Luftwaffe fired thousands of shells

At the same time the bombardments continued. From early September until the end of the year, the Luftwaffe bombed the city 272 times. A total of 13,000 shells rained down on the city in attacks that sometimes lasted 18 hours straight. Vladimir Garshin, chief pathologist at a hospital, recounted the sight of hospital corridors after a typical raid:

"Shapeless lumps of human flesh, mixed with bits of clothing and brick dust, all smeared with gut contents. Relatives flooded in, some with faces motionless as masks, others screaming and shouting," he recalled.

The devastation changed the city's character. Whole neighbourhoods stood in ruins. In many places, houses lost their facades and the homeless were forced to seek shelter wherever they could. The Hermitage, the art museum whose precious collections prescient director Joseph Orbeli had been fighting to save since the start of Operation Barbarossa, was now emptied of works of art, though some of the items never made it beyond a warehouse. But the museum still teemed with life. The cellars now served as shelters, and some 2,000 of the museum's staff, artists and academics lived within the building's spacious halls and rooms. One of them was the architect Alexander Nikolsky.

"We haven't had electric lights here for more than a week. There's no heat either. We sit in the dark, with only primitive oil lamps. But we're not feeling too bad anyway, and we're planning to celebrate the New Year," Nikolsky wrote defiantly on the final day of 1941.

Leningrad didn't surrender. ■

WHY COULDN'T...

...the Germans capture Leningrad?

Hitler was convinced that the Germans could easily take Leningrad. However, problems mounted for the Germans and the historically important city remained in Soviet hands.

When the German army surrounded Leningrad, Hitler reportedly had invitations printed to celebrate victory in the city's Hotel Astoria. The dictator, however, never got to stage a party in Leningrad. Despite fierce and unrelenting attacks, the city held out through 872 days of siege until the Germans withdrew in January 1944.

The city was at least as important to Stalin as it was to Hitler. To lose Leningrad's bustling commercial port would have been a great loss. The Soviet leader therefore made every effort to resist the Germans, both before and during the siege. The Red Army's huge numbers helped keep the Germans at bay. Meanwhile, the German army suffered from a shortage of both men and equipment. This was due partly to heavy losses, and partly to troops and materiel being spread over multiple fronts. For

example, shortly after the encirclement had closed around Leningrad, a tank army was withdrawn from the city to support the attack on Moscow. The mighty railway guns, such as the 1,350-tonne *Schwerer Gustav*, were also never deployed against Leningrad, but instead used in the attack on the southern city of Sevastopol.

Last but not least, the Finns did not participate in the attack, nor did they effectively close the encirclement around the northern part of the city. The incomplete siege meant that supplies could enter from the north-east via Lake Ladoga. The supplies ensured the population kept up their defence, still able to fight and hold out against the Germans long enough for the tide of war to turn and the Germans' fighting ability to crumble.

The *Schwerer Gustav* railway gun might have made a difference at Leningrad.



By Amanda Lee Edelstein

Myths about Operation Barbarossa

On 22nd June 1941, the German army invaded the Soviet Union in a large-scale operation involving more than 3.8 million soldiers. Operation Barbarossa and the battles that followed resulted in several enduring myths that continue to circulate 80 years later.

What is the biggest myth about the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941?

The first myth I want to dispel is the notion that the Germans could achieve anything, while the Red Army was a bunch of clowns who only won because it had more soldiers and more equipment. It's important to say that the Soviet officers, and particularly the Soviet general staff, were in fact competent. The Soviets were concerned about the losses they were suffering. The Germans captured huge areas of territory, and so the Soviets did not have unlimited numbers of soldiers or people to work in the factories.

The Red Army outnumbered the Germans during parts of the war, but there were also periods when they were roughly equal on each side as the Germans inflicted heavy losses on the Soviet Union. However, the total Soviet mobilisation of resources was far greater than the German one. Overall, the Red Army had two to three times as many men in the field as Germany had.

So, what did the Germans do wrong in their campaign on the Eastern Front?

The campaign went wrong because the overall strategic

plan and the notion of what they wanted compared to what they could achieve failed. You can have the bravest soldiers and the most brilliant officers, but if you don't have a leader who sits down and soberly asks "What can we realistically achieve?", "When does it become hubris?" and "When have we gone beyond what our forces are capable of?", you've squandered any hope of winning, even if you enjoy plenty of silver linings along the way.

The Germans went from victory to victory, encircling huge Soviet forces as they pushed further and further into the country, but they overlooked the simple fact that logistically it couldn't be done. It was difficult enough to transport supplies, ammunition and new soldiers, as well as bring back the wounded, never mind make it all work over such long distances. So, by late autumn 1941, the German war machine was more or less at a standstill.

Is it true that the Germans had no winter uniforms available?

To the best of my knowledge, it's pretty much true. The German army had items of uniform that were intended for winter use. The problem was that they weren't designed for the extreme winter conditions in Russia. We also have to remember that this wasn't just a standard Russian winter, it was extremely cold. At the same time, German



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logistics had huge problems, so it wasn't just a question of not having enough winter uniforms and other winter equipment. The overriding problem was getting the winter gear to the front lines deep inside the Soviet Union.

Did German soldiers really use women's clothing, including fur coats, to keep warm?

The myth of German soldiers in women's clothing appeared first and foremost in the Soviet press. The story was convenient for the Soviet propaganda machine, which achieved two things at once by spreading the myth. First, to say how ill-prepared the Germans were to fight in the Soviet Union, and second, to make the German soldiers look ridiculous – if not outright emasculated or perverse. There's probably no doubt that German soldiers appeared in women's clothing on the Eastern Front. The winter was freezing cold, so any jacket, overcoat or dress would have been appreciated.

We should also remember that some of the clothes given to the Germans on the Eastern Front came from the German Jews killed in mass executions in Minsk, Riga and Vilnius. The Jews came to these places on the false premise that they had to go east and work. The poor, naive people packed a suitcase for what they probably thought were harsh conditions. The women's furs circulating at the front probably came from possessions the Germans had confiscated. An ordinary German soldier on the Eastern Front hardly walked around in a woman's coat, brassiere and girdle.

Is it true that the Soviet army was unprepared for a German invasion, so was taken completely by surprise?

The Soviet Union had actually been preparing for this war since 1928 and probably, in fact, for longer. The build-up of Soviet military was based on the experience of World War I. The Soviet Union therefore had a very different approach to mobilisation from Western countries in particular, who did not want another war. Nazi Germany was preparing for war, but predominantly for a blitzkrieg. It hadn't asked itself how to win if it wasn't by blitzkrieg.

The Soviet Union, on the other hand, had studied the lessons of World War I both militarily and politically. And virtually from day one it had said that the next war would be even bloodier, more protracted, tougher and more resource-intensive. This was being dealt with by purging the 'fifth column' on the basis that you didn't want traitors or spies in the country when the time came. The military leadership was convinced that sooner or later there would be another war.

Next, the country underwent enormous industrialisation from the late 1920s. This was scaled solely on how to win another big war. Almost every factory it built had a plan for what it would produce in wartime. If it built cars today, it could build light armoured cars tomorrow. If it made women's shoes, it had to make soldiers' boots in times of war. So, the whole country was industrialised for the purpose of winning another war. The plans weren't ►

Winter uniforms were in short supply, so German soldiers froze bitterly in the Russian cold. It meant the soldiers had to be creative with their clothing sometimes.

simply for a war against Germany, though. Some strategies were based on a war against Germany, Poland, Italy and Japan at the same time. In other words, they were preparing for a full-scale war and setting absurdly high production targets.

Were the Nazis and the Communists brutal to the same degree?

During the Cold War, many researchers – particularly in the US – spoke of totalitarianism as a type of social system that characterised Nazi Germany, Franco's Spain, Mussolini's Italy and Stalin's Soviet Union. These so-called totalitarian societies were particularly brutal, with one-party dictatorships and people enslaved and manipulated by propaganda. The idea that these systems were the same, that the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany were joined at the hip, still lives on today.

There is a tendency to say that the Nazis and the Communists were two of a kind. It's a difficult argument, but it's a myth, I think. If it is a myth,

it's firstly because there were two different logics in the two systems. The Nazi system was preoccupied with classifying by race and had a notion that race was inherently inherited and existed in equal measure between men, women and children. So, once you belonged to a 'rogue race', it was almost in your blood that you were an enemy of Germany and that you would conspire against Germany. This gave rise to Hitler's plans for the systematic extermination of Europe's Jews. The Soviet Union also accepted that enemies died in long, long lines, but the difference was that in the Soviet Union, people were defined by social and political criteria, and women and children were spared to a greater extent. The main enemy in the Soviet view was men.

My logic does not quite hold, I hasten to add. Because during the war, Stalin also deported a number of national groups, such as Crimean Tatars and Chechens to the last child and woman. Again, the difference was that although many of these people died during the deportations, there was

The Nazi leadership
was guilty of hubris when it decided to invade Russia without planning for a protracted war.



In the Red Army, it takes a very brave man to be a coward. ■ Georgy Zhukov, Soviet Marshal.

nothing in the Soviet archives to suggest that death and extermination was the aim. So, there was no mass murder programme for women and children in the Soviet Union, either during the war or before the war. That's a very significant difference. For all their monstrosity, there's a big difference in how these two regimes implemented terror.

Was the whole Soviet Union really united against Nazi Germany?

That's a myth that the current Russian regime spends a lot of energy maintaining and selling to the outside world. It is that from day one – 22nd June 1941 – people flocked to the workplaces, with women and children saying, "Now that daddy has left his workbench, we must take over."

The idea of a united Soviet people fighting the Nazis – that is indeed a myth. First of all, we know that there were very many deserters in the Red Army, not just in 1941, but in fact throughout the war. We also know that it took bone-deep terror to keep soldiers fighting. As Marshal Zhukov put it: "In the Red Army, it takes a very brave man to be a coward." And then there's the whole fact that there were a myriad of minorities in the Soviet Union and quite large social differences.

So, minorities and those groups who didn't want the war saw the German soldiers as liberators?

It depends on the period. If we stay in 1941, then people didn't know what to expect when the Germans came. The Germans didn't drive through a town with a microphone and say, "You are all sub-humans." The Germans had a propaganda apparatus that specifically targeted some of these groups with the message that they were taking out the Jews and the top Bolsheviks, then once they were shot, the rest could live happily under German control. Given Stalin's own terror apparatus, there were some who thought that things couldn't get any worse under the Germans, and if anything, would probably get better. That's not to say that they were Nazis, but a sign that they were ordinary people trying to cope in a really difficult world.

Why did the Japanese not attack at the same time as the Germans, and what would have been the significance of such an attack?

German-Japanese cooperation was not very extensive in the real world. For a long time, the

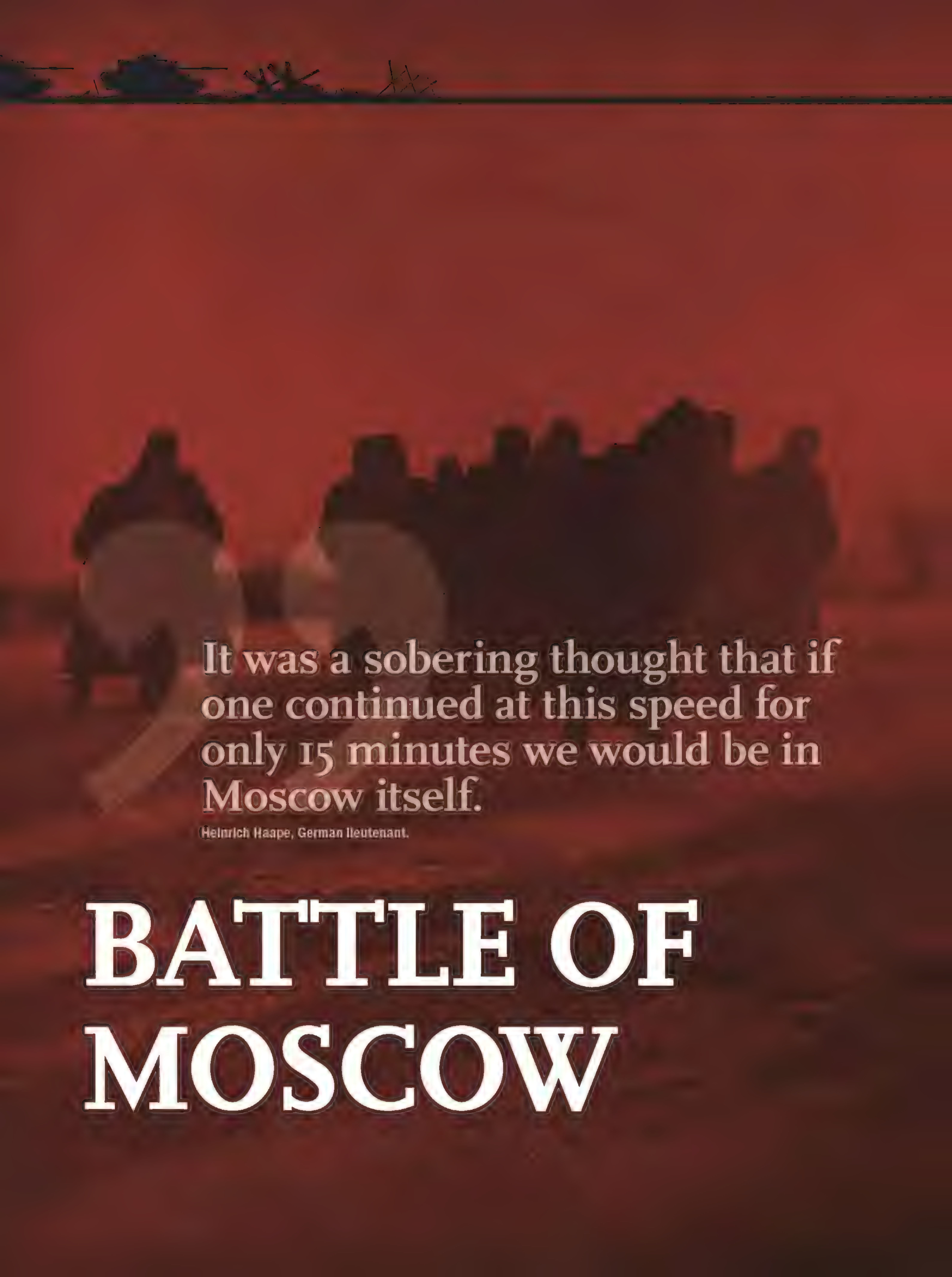


The Soviet Union and Japan had several border skirmishes in the 1930s. Yet Japan did not support Germany in 1941.

Japanese felt they had a free hand in the war against the Soviet Union. At that time, the Japanese needed strategic raw materials, including oil, because the US had imposed an oil embargo on the country. Japan could get this not by attacking eastern Siberia, but by expanding south. If Japan had invaded the Soviet Union, it would have put itself in a worse geostrategic position. The Japanese might well have beaten the Soviets, but then they would have been left with a lot of dead soldiers and new territory with no attractions. Sure, there was some coal, gold and various other things, but that wasn't what Japan needed.

If the whole of the Soviet Union had been conquered, there would have been huge oil fields that the Germans would have had access to. But for the Japanese to benefit from the oil, it had to be transported over 8,000 kilometres. There are limits to what you can carry over that distance. The Japanese and Germans didn't trust each other very much either, so the Japanese couldn't depend on Hitler's friendship for ever. So, Japan's primary interests were not in the Soviet Union – they were more in a southerly direction.

If the Soviet Union had found itself with an extra adversary to contend with, one that had taken the Soviet Pacific ports, for example, to prevent US lend-lease aid coming that way, then 1942 or 1943 might well have seen a collapse of the Soviet Union. But we probably would not have seen the effect as early as 1941. ■



It was a sobering thought that if one continued at this speed for only 15 minutes we would be in Moscow itself.

Heinrich Haape, German lieutenant.

BATTLE OF MOSCOW

Moscow, November 1941



A few kilometres from Moscow, the Germans were halted. A combination of fresh Soviet reinforcements and winter weather ended the advance.

Battle of Moscow

German generals believed that Operation Barbarossa had delivered a series of crushing victories, and that the Soviet Union was on the verge of collapse. They were so sure that the capture of Moscow would send the enemy into the abyss that they drove their exhausted troops forward in one final push to crush the Red Army.

By Esben Mønster-Kjær

No army had ever suffered such losses as the Soviets during Operation Barbarossa. Now, in late September 1941, the campaign would be brought to a victorious conclusion with Operation Typhoon, launched against Moscow. If it had been up to the German generals, their soldiers would already be there. After victory at Smolensk back in July, they wanted to proceed directly to the Soviet capital, where they expected to crush any lingering resistance. But Hitler decided that the industrial city of Leningrad in the north and the rich farmland around Kiev [now Kyiv] in the south were more important targets.

"The shame of it is that time is frittering away, and time is the stuff of victory," wrote Franz Halder in a letter to his wife. Halder was Chief of the General Staff of the German Army and thus the main force behind Operation Barbarossa's battle plan. He always sought out quick victories, so Hitler's campaign against Kiev was a pig's ear in his eyes. But at least he'd been guaranteed that Moscow would be next.

And so, on 6th September, Führer Directive No 35 announced that Operation Typhoon against the Soviet capital would begin at the end of the month. This final push would bring the campaign in the East to a successful conclusion.

"Fast Heinz" struck first

Operation Typhoon began with Panzer General Heinz Guderian's push on 30th September 1941. He was allowed to make an early start because his *Panzergruppe 2* (2nd Panzer Group) had the furthest distance to travel to reach Moscow, mostly on rough dirt roads. The opposition, however, fought back. The Red Army had dug in during the weeks the Germans had focussed their efforts on Ukraine, and it took two days for "Fast Heinz" to break through. His tanks rolled eastwards, while the rest of *Heeresgruppe Mitte* (Army Group Centre) readied itself to follow. Artillery Captain Georg Richter had spent a sunny day observing the earthworks dug by Soviet soldiers on the opposite bank of the Desna River. His rank were not privy to the High Command's plans, but rumours were flying around.

"I believe the attack will start the next day; in my opinion it will be the last big operation this

year," he wrote in his diary on the night of 2nd October. Richter was up again at 04.40, when 20 German batteries opened fire. Stukas circled the sky as they waited for observers to designate their targets. Signal flares flew upwards to mark the front line, Soviet positions fell one by one, and then it was the turn of the tanks. The situation was pleasantly

FACTS

Although the fighting strength of the Germans was weakened, they could still muster up to

2,000,000

men for the offensive against Moscow.



familiar to one of the German soldiers: *"Everything was rolling like in the good old days; only one order remained – get moving forward with everything available!"*

The soldier's column of half-tracked vehicles was the first German unit to break through the Soviet positions and hit the main road to Moscow.

"We were calling the shots once again in the advance. It made a tremendous impression on us! Wherever the enemy had convinced himself he had erected an invisible barrier to hold us up, we drove over it hardly noticing. We penetrated kilometre after kilometre further eastward and soon we were well in the rear of the enemy."

On the southernmost axis of advance, Guderian followed closely behind the front ranks of his panzer

divisions. Along the roadside he saw masses of burned-out wrecks whose Soviet crews had been caught off guard when German tanks suddenly appeared in front of them. Near a hilltop with a windmill, he stopped to take a longer look:

"The countryside showed traces of fierce fighting. There were dead and wounded Russians to be seen, and during the short walk to the windmill I and my companions found 14 unwounded Russians hiding in the long grass, whom we made prisoners; among them was an officer who was still engaged in talking to someone in Sevsk on a telephone."

While Army Group Centre's infantry divisions pinned down the enemy, the panzer divisions pushed past them and then moved into the enemy's rear. In the north, the trap was sprung around the town of Vyazma, some ►

Operation Typhoon
was launched at high speed. The advance of the panzer divisions proceeded according to plan, despite heavy fighting along the way.



Stalin planned to move Soviet capital east

Hitler's Berlin bunker was nothing compared to the shelter Stalin built for himself in Kuybyshev. The city would become the Soviet capital if the Germans took Moscow, and Stalin took no chances with security.

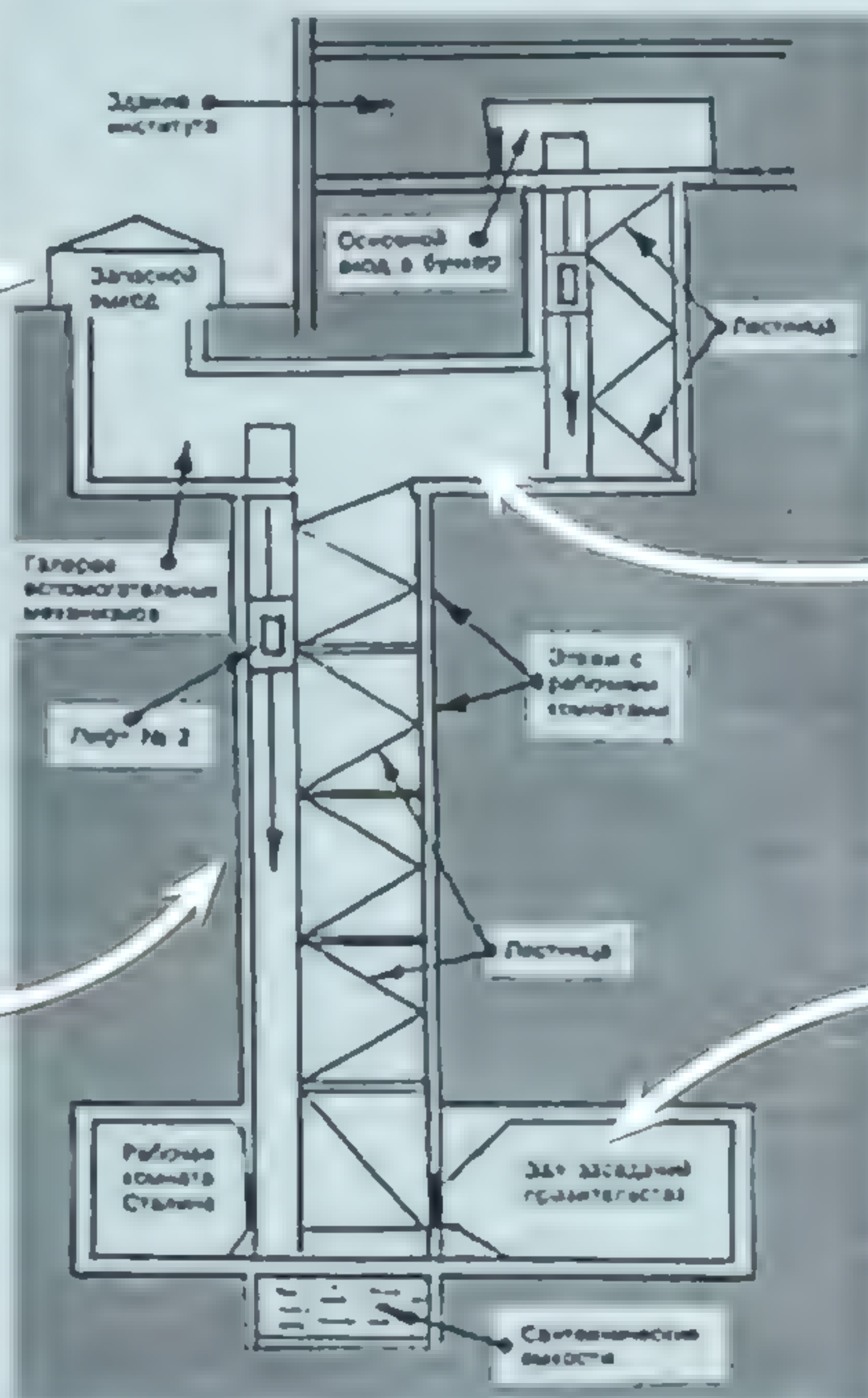
During the Battle of Moscow, Stalin sent most of the Soviet's state administration 1,000 km east to Kuybyshev, now Samara. He himself would follow if the Germans captured the capital, so a safe house was built for him. The dictator's personal quarters were 37

metres below ground, and in addition to earth, the complex was protected by a four-metre-thick layer of concrete. This meant that

the bunker could withstand a direct hit from a blast equivalent to two tonnes of TNT. The complex at Kuybyshev had its own power and water supplies, as well as enough provisions to keep it out of contact with the outside world for five days. The underground location remained a state secret until 1991.

THE ENTRANCE was via a discreet door in an administration building. From here, stairs and an elevator led 14 metres down to the secret areas below.

THE SHAFT with stairs and lift extended 24 metres down. It was surrounded by heavy concrete and flanked by offices.



ON THE TOP FLOOR were the guardroom, stores and machinery that supplied the bunker with power, water and fresh air.

STALIN'S CHAMBERS were on the lowest level 37 metres below ground, along with a conference room.

235 km from Moscow. Further south, the Germans surrounded other forces at Bryansk. The first stage of the battle plan was complete, with large Soviet forces caught in traps that began to tighten around them. Four armies were trapped at Vyazma, three at Bryansk to the south. They could not be completely cut off yet, however. Only a thin ring surrounded the hundreds of thousands of Soviet soldiers. A soldier from the 7th Panzer Division described the fighting:

"Inevitably it happened as it had to! With no centralised control, the Russians massed against our positions and stormed them day and night. The enemy successfully broke through several times at night. Initially with small bitterly fighting sub-units and later with dynamically led complete formations, they got through our positions. In such cases they even penetrated battalion headquarters and artillery positions, where hand-to-hand fighting broke out."

Groups of Soviet soldiers escaped, and individual divisions also managed to fight their way through the

lines. But as the days passed, the armies began to disintegrate. Supplies failed to arrive, troops ran out of ammunition and generals lost control of units. Attempts to break out continued but with less and less strength. One lieutenant watched as a disorganised mob of resigned soldiers almost wandered into one attack:

"The first bursts caused huge losses of people and materiel. Their attack was absolutely unbelievable ... Without deviating they came directly at us. What targets they presented our forward artillery observers! They sent salvos of artillery, without pause, one after the other into the enemy hordes. It caused a practically unbelievable destruction."

The armies in Vyazma finally surrendered on 13th October, and soon the rest of the enclosed forces followed. The commander of Army Group Centre, Fedor von Bock, catalogued the score in a report home:

"The battle at Vyazma and Bryansk has resulted in the collapse of the Russian front, which was fortified in depth. Eight Russian armies with 73 rifle and

cavalry divisions, 13 tank divisions and brigades and strong artillery were destroyed in the difficult struggle against a numerically far superior foe."

According to von Bock, he had taken some 675,000 prisoners, 1,300 tanks, 4,400 guns, 1,000 anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns, 87 aircraft and staggering amounts of materiel. This was added to the huge quantities of prisoners and munitions that had already fallen into German hands at the start of the campaign. It seemed inconceivable that the Red Army could continue to consume manpower at such a rate for much longer.

For many Soviet soldiers, surrender had been a relief. They looked forward to avoiding starvation, the merciless German guns, diving Stuka from above and the increasingly violent chaos. But their encounters with German "mercy" made them reconsider whether it might not have been better to fight to the last man. A Soviet eyewitness saw a column of 15,000 prisoners being led west:

"Most of them could hardly keep going and despite that they were constantly cudgelled. They simply broke down and remained lying on the ground. If someone from the local population threw them a loaf of bread they would be beaten or even directly shot on the spot. The edges of the road were covered with bodies, which were left lying for days. Only 2,000 of these 15,000 prisoners survived their arrival at Smolensk."

Field Marshal von Bock personally saw the suffering of the prisoners marching away from Vyazma and Bryansk. As his staff car drove east, it passed endless lines of men in platoons:

"The impression of the tens of thousands of prisoners of war, who were scarcely guarded, marching toward Smolensk, is dreadful. Dead-tired and half-starved, these unfortunate people stagger along. Many have fallen dead or collapsed from exhaustion on the road."

His compassion did not run so deep, however, that von Bock felt compelled to do anything to help the dying men. As commander-in-chief, the prisoners were his responsibility, but he had a campaign to win, and the army's meagre supplies all went to his own troops.

Conditions did not improve significantly as the Soviet prisoners reached their camps. Operation Barbarossa was an ideological showdown and race war whose ultimate goal was to win land for the Germans to colonise. Executions, starvation and disease were the order of the day. Around 2.8 million died before February 1942, when the Nazi regime changed policy. Victory on the Eastern Front had not yet been won, and rather than leave the prisoners to perish, they would be put to good use as free labour.

Lenin's body was sent to safety

While Soviet forces still fought for their lives at Vyazma and Bryansk, General Georgy Zhukov was

given the thankless task of defending Moscow. Zhukov had the status of the Red Army's miracle worker and was sent from crisis to crisis, where he put the Soviet troops to work. But he had only 90,000 men with which to defend the capital, now the target of five German armies and two panzer groups.

The soldiers were placed in the Mozhaisk line, which lay about 100 km west of the capital. Their numbers were so few that Zhukov had to concentrate his forces on four acutely critical points. The situation seemed hopeless even to the greatest optimists inside Moscow, and their numbers dwindled daily. The front was now so close that German planes were appearing on frequent bombing raids. The air raids were not the first – the enemy had appeared over the city as early as July – and Stalin again responded with raids on Berlin. Now, though, the Luftwaffe possessed runways so close that even short-range aircraft could join the bombing missions. They had to be conducted at night, however, because a massive number of anti-aircraft guns made a daylight attack too dangerous. The factory workers, many of them women, served double duty as home defence brigade members after hours. Anastasia Egorova later described the ordeal involved in removing German incendiary bombs from the roofs:

"Of course we were frightened. These phosphorus fire bombs were blazing and throwing off sparks and you had to go right up to them, pick them up and run off and find somewhere to put them out. Sparks could quite easily hit, you know, because they were flying off in all directions. It was terrifying, of course, but after a while we got very fierce."

Stalin and senior members of the party did not feel the same swell of courage in their chests. On the contrary, the leadership began to prepare for the imminent arrival of the Germans. The Soviet leader had placed an evacuation plan for Moscow in his ►

The Red Army had a clear advantage: clothing suitable for winter weather.



The fur-lined cap is a ushanka. A German stole this hat and adorned it with the German eagle.

Thousands of civilians were sent to Moscow to dig defences to keep the German invaders out of the capital.



FACTS

If Moscow fell, Stalin would move the capital to Kuybyshev. This was where much of the **Soviet war industry** was located. After the war, the city produced army materiel almost exclusively, transforming it into a closed city where no visitors were allowed.

drawer back in the spring. Then, when the prospect of a German attack was still just rumour, a local official recommended that a million citizens be evacuated from the city immediately, just in case. But the Soviet leader refused to take this drastic step. Now, with the enemy near, the great exodus was finally under way. Stalin fired the starting pistol on 15th October when he ordered government offices closed and officials to seek refuge in the East. They were also entrusted with the coffin containing Lenin's body, so that the sacred relic would not be defiled by Nazi hands. The state administration's flight did not go unnoticed by Moscow's residents, and thousands set about packing their belongings before leaving. One journalist watched dejectedly as chaos raged at the station from which trains to Siberia departed:

"16th October was an awful day for Moscow. Trains were not just made up from passenger wagons, but also goods wagons and underground carriages. Trains ... departed in dense rows separated only by visual distance."

The evacuation should have been orderly, but panic set in from the start. Officials flocked to the station

even if they'd not been told to leave. There they were swallowed up by the crowd of residents pushing and shoving to get on a train. Behind them, in the empty homes, looting started immediately, despite police attempts to prevent the break-ins.

Stalin himself decided to remain in Moscow until further notice. He feared that if Communism's patriarch also fled, the soldiers and factory workers left behind would lose the will to resist that they would need in the coming weeks. The capital could not be given up without a fight. The Communist Party's power base lay in the large cities; Kiev had already fallen and the Germans continued to besiege Leningrad. The regime did not trust the peasants, who would rather have their old farms back than toil in forced collectivised state farms. Even here in his hour of need, the dictator remembered that he had enemies other than Hitler to watch out for.

Consequently, Stalin remained in the half-empty Kremlin, where engineering troops were already setting mine traps. When the enemy appeared



We asked for winter clothing ... but were informed that we would receive it in due course and were instructed not to make further unnecessary requests. ■ Heinz Guderian, German general.

and German staff officers took the government offices, they would be in for a nasty surprise.

Roads vanished beneath mud

West of Moscow, Army Group Centre was on the move again. It had taken two weeks and a great effort to wipe out the enemy at Vyazma and Bryansk, but now the troops once again set course for the Soviet capital. Guderian's Panzergruppe 2 had meanwhile grown by several divisions and been renamed the *2 Panzerarmee* (2nd Panzer Army). The first harbinger of winter had also appeared, as an artilleryman discovered when he looked out of a window in the middle of the night.

"It was snowing! The wind drove thick clouds of snowflakes across the earth and the ground was already covered in a thin sheet of snow. Even the assault guns parked outside on the road had taken on a curious appearance. They were completely white as if covered in icing sugar!"

As soon as the white flakes began to fall, Guderian knew trouble was coming: *"It did not lie for long and, as usual, the roads rapidly became nothing but canals of bottomless mud, along which our vehicles*

could only advance at snail's pace and with great wear to the engines. We asked for winter clothing—we had already done this once before—but were informed that we would receive it in due course and were instructed not to make further unnecessary requests of this type," he wrote.

Every spring and autumn a phenomenon the Russians dubbed *rasputitsa* (road divergence) occurred. Melting snow broke up most of the Soviet Union's unpaved road network, and vehicles had great difficulty getting around. "Fast Heinz" was stuck:

"The next few weeks were dominated by the mud. Wheeled vehicles could only advance with the help of tracked vehicles. These latter, having to perform tasks for which they were not intended, rapidly wore out. Since chains and couplings for the towing of vehicles were lacking, bundles of rope were dropped from aeroplanes to the immobilised vehicles. The supplying of hundreds of such vehicles and their crews had now to be done by the air force, and that for weeks on end."

Even before everything had drowned in mud, the Luftwaffe flew around the clock to keep the ►

Freezing temperatures continued throughout the winter of 1941, which was unusually cold even by Russian standards.



Stalin sold defeat as success

As the Germans approached Moscow, Stalin promised a swift victory. He paved the way on 6th November 1941, when he addressed a number of top Communists celebrating the anniversary of the October Revolution.

The Soviet state administration had already left Moscow when Stalin tried to boost the morale of the remaining party members in the city. He himself had stayed behind so that his departure did not discourage the defending soldiers.

The anniversary of the October Revolution was to be marked by a parade on 7th November, and the day before Stalin

addressed a group of party members. He delivered an incisive analysis of German plans which had predicted victory within months. In turn, he told a huge lie when reporting German casualty figures five times higher than in actuality. He also claimed that the Germans had numerical superiority to thank for their victories. The regime hid the fact that the Red Army began the war with

huge numbers tanks and planes but had lost them due to poor leadership. Concluding the speech, Stalin predicted victory soon. The British and Americans would land in Europe, and German workers were poised to overthrow Hitler's regime. The speech demonstrated that even Stalin failed to believe that the Soviet Union was capable of holding out against Germany on its own.

1. Citation:

"In four months of war we have lost 350,000 in killed, and 378,000 missing, and our wounded number 1,020,000. In the same period the enemy has in killed, wounded and prisoners lost more than four and a half million men."

2. Citation:

"Our tanks are superior in quality to the German tanks, and our glorious tankmen and artillerymen have more than once put the vaunted troops of the Germans, with their numerous tanks, to flight. But we still have several times fewer tanks than the Germans. Therein lies the secret of the temporary successes of the German army."

3. Citation:

"Neither can there be any doubt that the appearance of a second front on the European continent—and it must unquestionably appear in the near future—will essentially ease the situation of our army to the detriment of the German army."

4. Citation:

"Hitler's stupid policy, which has turned the peoples of the USSR into the sworn enemies of present-day Germany – all this could not but set the German people against the unnecessary and ruinous war. Only the Hitlerite fools fail to understand that not only the European rear but also the German rear of the German troops represents a volcano which is ready to erupt and overwhelm the Hitlerite adventurers."

Stalin exaggerated wildly when he claimed in November 1941 that the Germans had lost over 4.5 million men.



We had to light fires to thaw the earth before we could dig into it. ■ Vera Evsyukhova, civilian, who was ordered to dig tank traps.

advance going. The German forces had reached so far into the Soviet Union that their supply chains could no longer feed them.

As always with military battle plans, Operation Barbarossa had been based on guesswork. General Halder and the High Command's other bright minds drew on their experience and knowledge of their own forces along with intelligence about the Red Army as they tried to predict how the campaign would unfold. The Germans took for granted that they would, of course, beat the Soviets. And the generals also assumed that victory would be won within 500 kilometres of the border that had separated the two great powers since the partition of Poland.

The distance allowed Germany's fleet of trucks to keep the troops supplied. Once the Red Army had lost its resilience, it would be a manageable task for smaller forces to advance on strategically important targets further away.

This meant that the 3.8 million-strong invading army would not have to rely on the rail network in the east, whose broad gauge was around 100 mm wider than the German tracks. As the weeks passed, however, the realities of the campaign diverged ever further from the general staff's predictions. German forces won crushing victories, but they had already crossed the invisible 500 km border when the pincer manoeuvres at Smolensk and Kiev were deployed. At the same time, the fleet of trucks dwindled as lorries were lost in battle or wore out.

The railways were the only alternative, and the Germans worked feverishly to change the rail gauge. It also became necessary to reinforce the foundations under the rails, which were often in a poor state, and new stations had to be built. German locomotives could not travel as far as Soviet ones before coal and water had to be added.

By October, the Germans were able to run trains all the way to Smolensk. Just not enough. Army Group Centre needed 29 whole trainloads of supplies each day, but was promised a maximum of 20, and the figure fell as low as 16 in November. A shortage of spare parts meant that vehicles were at a standstill, and front-line units lacked basic necessities such as food, ammunition and, above all, fuel. Guderian exploded when he received an order from Hitler to capture key bridges far ahead with "fast-moving units".

"We could only advance as fast as our supply situation would allow. Travelling along the now completely disintegrated Orel-Tula road our vehicles could occasionally achieve a maximum speed of 12 miles per hour. There were no 'fast-moving units' any more. Hitler was living in a world of fantasy," Guderian wrote.

Over 1,000 km to the west, Halder had also realised that blitzkrieg was out of the question for the time being. "Viewed as a whole the situation is



Rasputitsa – road divergence – was a weather phenomenon that turned Russian roads into mud every spring and autumn.

determined by railroad capacity and flow of supplies. There is no point in pushing operations onward before we have not, step by step, established, a solid foundation for them, Failing to do that inevitably would bring fatal reverses down upon us," Halder wrote soberly on 4th November.

Aside from small advances, Army Group Centre's push was paused to allow the supply companies time to catch up with the troops in front.

Stalin told his soldiers a lie

Before mud and huge supply problems virtually halted the Germans, they had broken through the Mozhaisk line. General Zhukov did not have enough men to defend the line, and nothing now stood between the invading army and the Soviet capital. 250,000 citizens were therefore conscripted to build defensive works on the city's boundaries, and Vera Evsyukhova took part in the construction of tank trenches:

"They were huge, about eight metres wide and ten metres deep – as big as that. It was mostly us women that did the work, and it was hard labour. We had to light fires to thaw the earth before we could dig into it. On top it was frozen solid, but deep down it was not so hard."

Sometimes German planes attacked, and the women had to remove the casualties before continuing their work. At the same time, new units were formed of factory workers who, after very brief training, had to be led against the enemy. Amid the feverish preparations came the anniversary of the 1917 October Revolution. Stalin decided he would mark the day even if the enemy was at the gates. In an imaginative radio address, he promised victory soon.

"Hunger and impoverishment reign in Germany to-day; in four months of war Germany has lost ►

four and a half million men; Germany is bleeding, her reserves of man-power are giving out, the spirit of indignation is spreading not only among the peoples of Europe who have fallen under the yoke of the German invaders but also among the German people themselves ... The German invaders are straining their last efforts." he claimed.

In a few months, a year at most, Hitler's empire would collapse, Stalin vowed. Artillery Cadet Mark Ivanikhin heard the words but didn't really believe the war would soon be over. As always, Stalin spoke only for a short time. Then Ivanikhin and thousands of soldiers set off,

for the day was to be marked by a demonstration of the Red Army's strength. Unit after unit marched through the snow past the Kremlin walls.

"It was winter or rather it was November, but the snow was bitterly cold and it was dark. As we paraded across Red Square I was somewhere on the fifth line on the right flank, with my eyes facing right. I was surprised to see Stalin looked so short in his hat and ear flaps, not at all like the man we had seen in the portraits everywhere," Ivanikhin wrote.

From the square, the soldiers continued directly to the front. The young artillery squadron was among

The tide of war
turned for the Red Army at Moscow. The Soviets were finally able to mount a strong counteroffensive.



08/10

Rasputitsa, the weather phenomenon that turns roads to mud, delays the Germans across the entire front.

27/11

German panzer troops enter Moscow's outskirts. The advance stalls with the Kremlin just 16 km away.

05/12

After heated debate, Hitler agrees to halt the offensive. The same day, the Red Army launches a counteroffensive.

the few to survive the ordeal of the coming months. Temperatures dropped steadily and mud began to congeal on the Russian roads west of Moscow. The German vehicles could finally move again.

Generals put everything on the line

The time had come to make important decisions, and Chief of Staff Halder had summoned the top generals in the east to Army Group Centre's headquarters. His question to them was whether Operation Typhoon should continue. The chiefs of staff of Army Group North and South replied no, for on their fronts the

offensive power of the troops had long since been exhausted. Army Group Centre's chief of staff, however, saw the situation differently, admitting that while *"the danger that we might not succeed must be taken into account, it would be even worse to be left lying in the snow and the cold on open ground only 50km from the tempting objective"*.

The answer was exactly what Halder hoped to hear, for the High Command and Hitler himself wanted to fight on. Operation Typhoon was to continue. General Guderian was furious when he received his new order to swing in a wide arc around Moscow and capture the town of Gorky 400 km further east.

"This was not the month of May and we were not fighting in France!" he wrote. His 2nd Panzer Army was about to move into battle to take Tula south of Moscow, and from there it might be able to push 50 km further east, but that was as far as the forces could go. The order was impossible, he announced in protest. At full strength, the five armoured divisions under his command would have more than 900 tanks combined, but he could now deploy a mere 150. Halder therefore had to accept a less ambitious goal for Guderian's troops. Nevertheless, the situation looked promising when the German advance resumed on 15th November.

"Ninth Army has started the offensive and appears to have thrown back the surprised enemy a long distance. Report: 'Enemy is falling back of his own accord'. This has never happened before in this campaign," Halder noted hopefully in his war journal.

Even the more pessimistic Guderian could rejoice that his divisions were advancing steadily over the frozen and hard Russian soil:

"We are only nearing our final objective step by step in this icy cold and with all the troops suffering from the appalling supply situation ... Yet the brave troops are seizing all their advantages and are fighting with wonderful endurance despite all their handicaps. Over and over again I am thankful that our men are such good soldiers."

Cold became the biggest enemy

The freezing cold sapped their strength as the Germans continued. The temperature was permanently well below freezing, and the High Command had earlier warned that Army Group Centre should not expect winter gear until well into January. Some had begun to arrive, but not nearly enough. The soldiers had to fend for themselves, and General Guderian saw a group of his men wearing captured Soviet soldiers' coats and fur caps.

"The wind was forever howling and blowing in our faces [causing] ice to crystallise all over our faces, in front, behind, and on the nose," wrote one wretched machine gunner.

The German army's armaments were not designed for the deep frost, and even the fuel began to freeze on ►

LOSS FIGURES

Despite its victory, the Red Army's casualty figures were massive.

Around

600,000

were lost. The Germans also lost many men:

175,000

German soldiers were reported killed, wounded or missing.



It was -40° to -50°C outside. Most of the time even the rations were frozen. ■ Karl Rupp, German tank commander.



the coldest days. Antifreeze became as scarce as fuel, and even the tanks struggled to grip in the snow and ice because specialist winter fittings to attach to the caterpillar tracks never appeared. A tank commander named Karl Rupp was at the head of the advance:

"My Kampfgruppe [battle group] consisted of two PzKpfwIII [Panzer III] medium tanks, three PzKpfwII [Panzer II] light tanks, about 40 or 50 riflemen and one 88 mm. We were all dog-tired. The young men slept in any position whenever they got a chance. For weeks, we only got out of the tank for minutes at a time. Our breath condensed on the metal, so that everything you touched inside the tank was covered with ice. It was -40° to -50°C outside. Most of the time even the rations were frozen. At night we had to start up the tanks every two hours to keep the engines from freezing up."

Once the engine oil froze, the soldiers had to thaw it by lighting fires under the vehicle. The battle group's most precious weapon was the 88-mm gun. Despite being large, awkward to carry and slow to set up for firing, the gun's firepower made it indispensable.

"These alone could measure up to the Russian T-34 tanks, which were shooting up our tanks like rabbits. We were powerless to do anything about it with our light guns," Rupp recalled.

Despite the cold, supply problems and exhaustion, the advance continued. The Soviet forces in front of Moscow fought bitterly for every metre, but every day the German forces drew closer.

In late November, troops of Army Group Centre approached Moscow from the north-west. Despite the cold and exhaustion, some soldiers felt a sense of relief, for now they dared to hope that their ordeal would soon be over. With any luck, they would survive after so many of their comrades had been lost. The invasion of the Soviet Union had brought great victories, but also enormous casualties.

The campaign had already cost around 500,000 men when Operation Typhoon started, and since then a further 100,000 had been added to the tally. Officer casualties were

German soldiers surrendered to the Red Army, which suddenly received large numbers of prisoners of war.

Thousands of Czech hedgehog anti-tank obstacles were set up in and around Moscow.

The cast iron beams formed effective tank barriers to block the German blitzkrieg.

particularly high. Every third officer who had crossed the border into the Soviet Union had now been killed, wounded or captured. On paper, the *Heer* (Army) on the Eastern Front numbered 136 divisions, but in fighting strength it amounted to just 83. The weakness was greatest in the armoured and motorised infantry divisions, which formed the army's spearhead. Halder knew all this, but it failed to dent his belief that Operation Typhoon could be brought to anything other than a satisfactory conclusion.

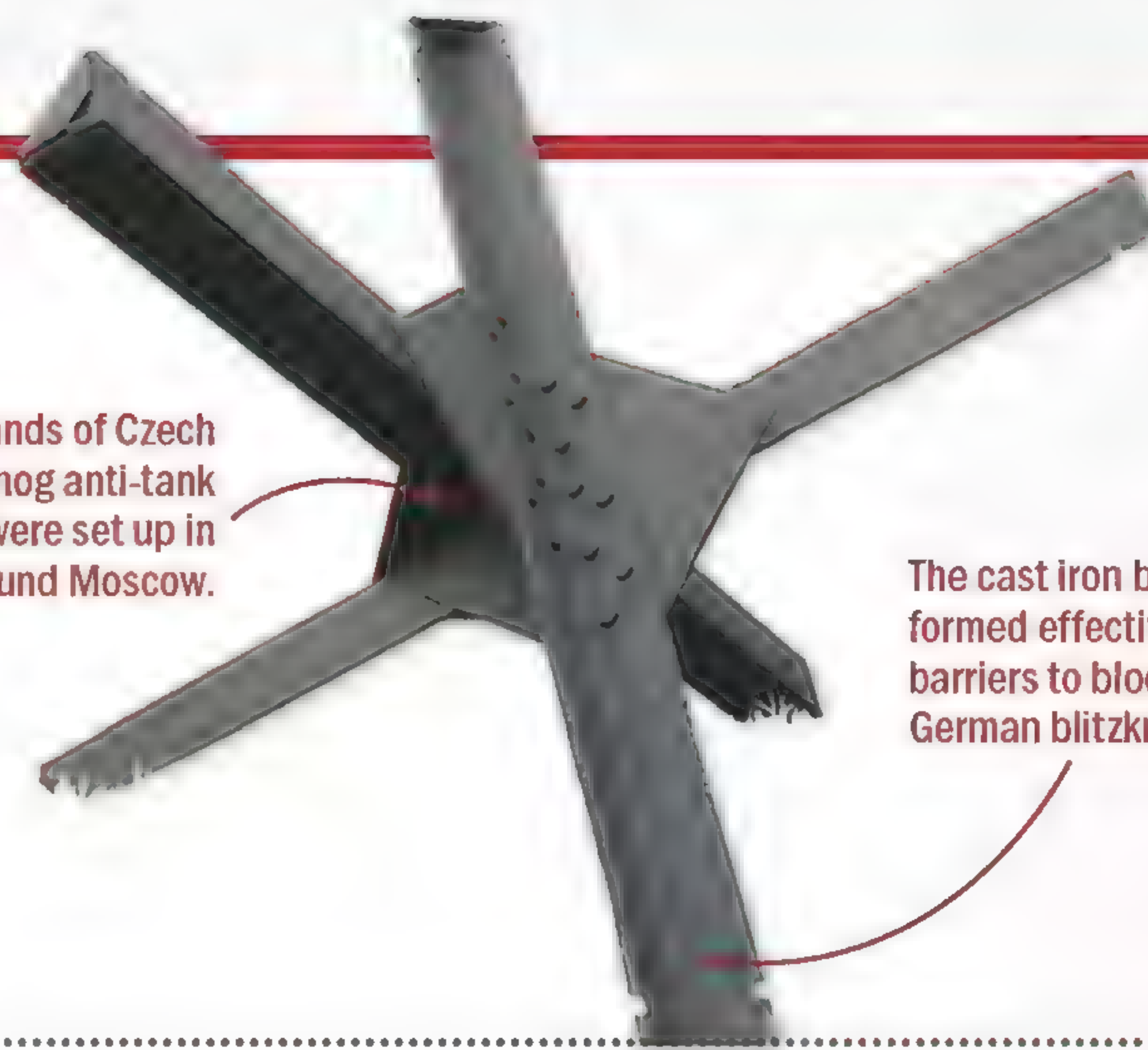
"We must understand that things are going much worse for the enemy than for us and that these battles are less a question of strategic command than a question of energy," he lectured a general who was beginning to seriously doubt his ability to continue.

In front of the Germans stood almost 250 Soviet divisions, and reinforcements were on their way from Siberia. The strength ratio did not worry Halder, however, for many of these divisions were as weak as the Germans. The Red Army lacked munitions, and nobody from the lowest privates to senior generals had much – if any – experience to speak of. Two hundred brand new divisions had been created, but they merely replaced units already wiped out.

Inside Moscow, Stalin saw the situation much as Halder did. He worriedly asked General Zhukov to answer honestly, *"as a member of the Party"*, if the city could be held. It could, Zhukov promised – if he received reinforcements. And fresh troops came, pouring in from other fronts where German forces had ground to a halt because all supplies were being diverted to Army Group Centre. Soviet reinforcements also came from Siberia now Japan was no longer considered a threat. These divisions from the East were trained, fully manned and possessed a full inventory of guns and vehicles. On a front full of decimated forces, such units were invaluable.

The target came into sight

On 27th November, daring German soldiers succeeded in capturing a bridge leading across the Moscow-►



**The Russians are attacking. Don't you see the white ghosts?
We have got to open fire, now, now!** ■ German sergeant.

Volga Canal. The city was thus threatened by encirclement from the north. A few days later, the first units began to penetrate the city's outskirts, moving unhindered past local railway terminals and seeing signs indicating the direction to the centre. German Lieutenant Heinrich Haape sensed a rise in morale.

"Moscow, a city that had haunted our thoughts during the long, marching kilometres, and which now seemed to be approaching us like a city in a legend, screened from us by seven veils. It was a sobering, almost frightening, thought that if one continued at this speed for only 15 minutes we would be in Moscow itself, and a further 15 minutes would bring us into Red Square or to the walls of the Kremlin," Haape said of the mood.

Dreams of victory and rest, however, remained just that. Signs showed 16 km to the Kremlin, when the advance finally ground to a halt. Zhukov filled his front units with just enough troops to stop the Germans. The remainder of Soviet reinforcements were used to form a reserve that could pounce on the enemy in a counter-attack when the time came. A whiff of panic began to appear in the reports sent by Army Group

Centre to the High Command in Germany. But Chief of Staff Halder remained convinced that the enemy was on the verge of final collapse.

"I emphasise that we, too, are concerned about the human sacrifice. But an effort has to be made to bring the enemy to his knees by applying the last ounce of strength. Once it is conclusively shown that this is impossible, we shall make new decisions," Halder told the generals outside Moscow.

His determination, however, changed nothing. The German soldiers had no more strength to put into Operation Typhoon. The advance finally stalled in the first days of December, and Zhukov was able to finally seize the initiative from the Germans.

Zhukov struck back

The counteroffensive at Moscow began on 5th December. Zhukov could now throw more men into the battle than the Red Army had possessed in front of the city when Operation Typhoon began.

Artillery captain Georg Richter, whose guns had helped launch the offensive at the time, heard a sergeant sound the alarm: *"The Russians are*

Reinforcements poured into Moscow in large numbers from the Far East, where Japan was no longer perceived to pose a threat to the Soviet Union.



attacking. Don't you see the white ghosts? We have got to open fire, now, now!' For a while I could not see anything, although a burning haystack lit up the surrounding area to some extent, sufficient to shoot. But then, yes, I could see running spectre-like figures; ghosts, one might say. Our men have not got so many white camouflage smocks – they must be Russians."

For the Germans, not only had the conquest of Moscow failed, but they had no defensive plans, no prepared positions and were too scattered to form a coherent front line. The Soviet tanks could trundle effortlessly forward, while large numbers of infantry followed close behind. Panic broke out among the Germans, and soon a headlong flight was under way across the whole line. Captain Richter's column of guns was retreating on 13th December, but the road ahead was blocked by burnt-out German vehicles. The enemy was still close by.

"Brown figures poured out of the woods and a stream of German soldiers, drivers and vehicle crews came back towards me along the road. At first I did not know what I ought to do, I couldn't grasp it. One couldn't hold back the fleeing men who had been gripped by panic and shock. Most of them had not even held onto their rifles," Richter recalled.

The abrupt shift in the fortunes of war triggered a shock in Germany. The military High Command tried to get its bearings and adjust to the new realities, but Hitler denied them. He tried to talk himself into a more comfortable reality, as the armoured general Guderian experienced on 16th December 1941:

"During that night I received the call from Hitler that I had been expecting. He commanded that we hold fast, forbade further withdrawals and promised that we should receive replacements – to the number, I think, of 500 men – by air."

Five hundred men would not make any difference among the hundreds of thousands of German and Soviet soldiers on the move. Indeed, at this point, German generals still dared to defy Hitler's orders when they went against military logic. Operation Typhoon had failed. The Nazis' ambitions had proved greater than their strength. The same was true of the entire invasion that General Halder's staff had begun planning in the summer of 1940. The Soviet Union would not be overrun by German blitzkrieg, as had happened to a string of other countries. Hitler and his generals had to face the fact that they had committed themselves to a long, gruelling test of strength.

The Kremlin was visibly relieved to have succeeded in stopping the enemy on the doorstep of the capital. Senior Communist and future Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev saw the effect victory had on Stalin:

"After the successful conclusion of our operation outside Moscow... I was called to Moscow to consult with Stalin. I found myself

WHAT IF ...

... the Germans had captured Moscow?

If the Nazis had taken the capital, they would have delivered a major blow to the Soviets. But they overlooked the fact that the Eastern Front would not be decided by spots on the map.

Since WWII, historians have debated whether the loss of Moscow might have settled the war on the Eastern Front. However, the capital was never part of Operation Barbarossa, which aimed solely to wipe out the Red Army; a goal that by autumn 1941 seemed within reach. German High Command sent its exhausted troops forward towards Moscow to force the enemy into a final battle. The Germans were wrong, however, for despite huge losses, the

Soviet Union's fighting strength had not worn thin, as the Red Army's December counteroffensive proved.

Moscow didn't decide the war, but occupying it would have helped the Germans. Although many factories had moved east, the city still contained important war industries. The city was also the centre of the railway network, and its loss would have made it harder for Stalin to move his troops. The capture of Moscow would thus have put the Germans in a stronger position.



Even if the Germans had taken Moscow, the campaign in the east would not have ended there and then.

confronted with a new man... He had pulled himself together, straightened up, and was acting like a real soldier. He had begun to think of himself as a great military strategist, which made it harder than ever to argue with him... But I knew what sort of hero he was. I'd seen him when he was paralysed by his fear of Hitler, like a rabbit in front of a boa constrictor."

EUROPE – December 1941





SOVIET UNION

○ Moscow

Stalingrad ○

TURKEY

By December, the Germans were well inside Moscow's outskirts before the Red Army managed to slow the advance.

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The Russian landscape was flat and open and made for blitzkrieg. But every small village posed a danger from which the Russians could launch ambushes.



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In the first months of the invasion, Hitler's troops marched from one victory to the next. Nothing seemed capable of stopping the Germans.



OPERATION BARBAROSSA

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OPERATION BARBAROSSA

On a bright summer night in June 1941, Nazi Germany's troops launched a surprise attack on the Soviet Union. In a matter of weeks, the Red Army's defensive lines collapsed, and German panzer troops threatened to crush the entire Soviet defences. Yet within months, Stalin's troops rallied to defend the major cities of Leningrad, Kiev (now Kyiv) and Moscow, slowing Hitler's troops and buying the Soviet Union time to guarantee its future.

